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THE BLACK CAT

JAN. 1917

UNUSUAL SHORT STORIES

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Olivette Bourgeois

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JACK LONDON'S FIRST STORY AND HOW THE BLACK CAT SAVED HIM IN THIS ISSUE

The Black Cat

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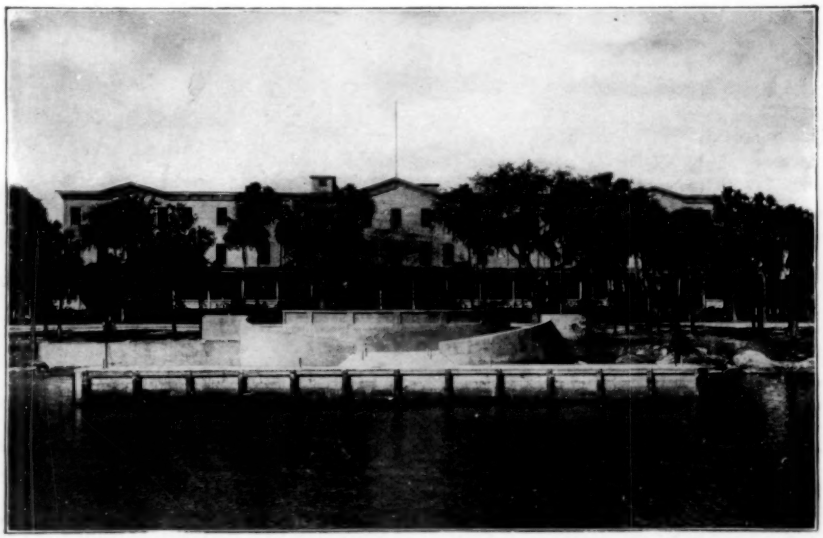

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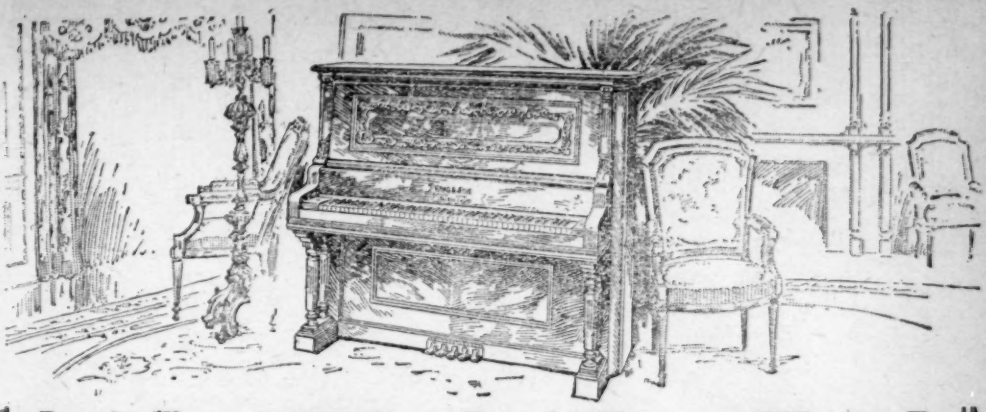

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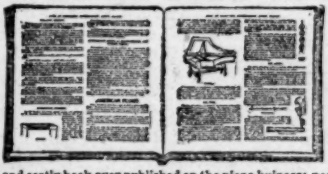

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The Black Cat's Editorial Page

Jack London - - - - The Story of a Story

Vagabond, explorer and oyster pirate; fisherman, gold prospector and toiler down among men; sociologist, student of metaphysics, and country gentleman,—Jack London was all of them—Jack London who died the other day. Perhaps his varied activities would fall into three classifications. First and always, he was the adventurer, following many trails and working at many trades; then the country gentleman, living in a more refined, if less invigorating atmosphere; and finally, the professional man of letters, doing his daily stint of a thousand words year in and year out, and making all other pursuits subservient to this one.

It is said of writers that they need not tramp over half the world in order to write great books. But it is quite probable that the man who does see half the world or all of it, for that matter, will sit down to write with a sub-conscious mind overflowing into note books, will in the actual labor of composition command a style of more than ordinary vigor. Jack London died at forty-one, at an age when many men are just starting out to test the broadening effects of travel. Seventeen years before his stories had begun to appear in print, and even at this time, he was drawing upon personal experiences and first-hand knowledge for the raw material which goes into stories. And at that time he had been seeing life in its broader aspects for nearly ten years, dating back to the end of his grammar school days and his entrance to man's estate as a longshoreman.

Thus from the first he experienced none of that writer's sterility which comes from lack of ideas. His struggle was not with matter, but with form. His years of apprenticeship were wholly dedicated to the mastery of technique and the cultivation of style; while other writers who lived less strenuously, butchered the former and worried along with a hybrid form of the latter as they put all of their energy into the pursuit of an idea that would be sure to take with the editors.

More than seventeen years ago, in May 1899, Jack London's first story, "A Thousand Deaths," was published in THE BLACK CAT. Doubtless many of our readers are already familiar with the facts concerning its publication as they are here set forth.

In *Martin Eden*, the book which more than any other of his is autobiography, London tells the old story of an author's struggle for recognition. Martin Eden is about to go back to coal heaving, despairing of fame as a writer, when a letter from "The White Mouse" informs him of the acceptance of his story, "The Whirlpool." That is the story in fictional form.

Here is the way London tells of his first acceptance by THE BLACK CAT, written as an introduction to "The Red Hot Dollar," a collection of tales by the founder of the magazine, the late Mr. H. D. Umbstaetter.

"As I say, I was at the end of my tether, beaten out, staved, ready to go back to coal-shoveling or ahead to suicide. And then one morning I received a short, thin letter from a magazine." (Mentioned as *The Transcontinental* in *Martin Eden*.) "This magazine had a national reputation. It had been founded by Bret Harte. It sold for twenty-five cents a copy. It held a four thousand word story of mine, 'To the End of the Trail.' I was modest. As I tore the envelope across the end, I expected to find a check for no more than forty dollars. Instead, I was coldly informed (by the Assistant

(Continued on page 8)

DEC 26 1916
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A THOUSAND DEATHS

BY JACK LONDON

I HAD been in the water about an hour, and cold, exhausted, with a terrible cramp in my right calf, it seemed as though my hour had come. Fruitlessly struggling against the strong ebb tide, I had beheld the maddening procession of the water-front lights slip by; but now I gave up attempting to breast the stream and contented myself with the bitter thoughts of a wasted career, now drawing to a close.

It had been my luck to come of good, English stock, but of parents whose account with the bankers far exceeded their knowledge of child-nature and the rearing of children. While born with a silver spoon in my mouth, the blessed atmosphere of the home circle was to me unknown. My father, a very learned man and a celebrated antiquarian, gave no thought to his family, being constantly lost in the abstractions of his study; while my mother, noted far more for her good looks than her good sense, sated herself with the adulation of the society in which she was perpetually plunged. I went through the regular school and college routine of a boy of the English bourgeois, and as the years brought me increasing strength and passions, my parents suddenly became aware that I was possessed of an immortal soul, and endeavored to draw the curb. But it was too late; I perpetrated the wildest and most audacious folly, and was disowned by my people, ostracized by the society I had so long outraged, and with the thousand pounds my father gave me, with the declaration that he would neither see me again nor give me more, I took a first-class passage to Australia.

Since then my life had been one long peregrination—from the Orient to the Occident, from the Arctic to the Antarctic—to find myself at last, an able seaman at thirty, in the full vigor of my manhood, drowning in San Francisco bay because of a disastrously successful attempt to desert my ship.

My right leg was drawn up by the cramp, and I was suffering the keenest agony. A slight breeze stirred up a choppy sea, which washed into my mouth and down my throat, nor could I prevent it. Though I still contrived to keep afloat, it was merely mechanical, for I was rapidly becoming unconscious. I have a dim recollection of drifting past the sea-wall, and of catching a glimpse of an up-river steamer's starboard light; then everything became a blank.

I heard the low hum of insect life, and felt the balmy air of a spring morning fanning my cheek. Gradually it assumed a rhythmic flow, to whose soft pulsations my body seemed to respond. I floated on the gentle bosom of a summer's sea, rising and falling with dreamy pleasure on each crooning wave. But the pulsations grew stronger; the humming, louder; the waves, larger, fiercer—I was dashed about on a stormy sea. A great agony fastened upon me. Brilliant, intermittent sparks of light flashed athwart my inner consciousness; in my ears there was the sound of many waters; then a sudden snapping of an intangible something, and I awoke.

The scene, of which I was protagonist, was a curious one. A glance sufficed to inform me that I lay on the cabin floor of some gentleman's yacht, in a most uncomfortable posture. On either side, grasping my arms and working them up and down like pump handles, were two peculiarly clad, dark-skinned creatures. Though conversant with most aboriginal types, I could not conjecture their nationality. Some attachment had been fastened about my head, which connected my respiratory organs with the machine I shall next describe. My nostrils, however, had been closed, forcing me to breathe through the

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mouth. Foreshortened by the obliquity of my line of vision, I beheld two tubes, similar to small hosing but of different composition, which emerged from my mouth and went off at an acute angle from each other. The first came to an abrupt termination and lay on the floor beside me; the second traversed the floor in numerous coils, connecting with the apparatus I have promised to describe.

In the days before my life had become tangential, I had dabbled not a little in science, and, conversant with the appurtenances and general paraphernalia of the laboratory, I appreciated the machine I now beheld. It was composed chiefly of glass, the construction being of that crude sort which is employed for experimentative purpose. A vessel of water was surrounded by an air chamber, to which was fixed a vertical tube, surmounted by a globe. In the center of this was a vacuum gauge. The water in the tube moved upward and downward, creating alternate inhalations and exhalations, which were in turn communicated to me through the hose. With this, and the aid of the men who pumped my arms so vigorously, had the process of breathing been artificially carried on, my chest rising and falling and my lungs expanding and contracting, till nature could be persuaded to again take up her wonted labor.

As I opened my eyes the appliance about my head, nostrils and mouth was removed. Draining a stiff three fingers of brandy, I staggered to my feet to thank my preserver, and confronted—my father. But long years of fellowship with danger had taught me self-control, and I waited to see if he would recognize me. Not so; he saw in me no more than a runaway sailor and treated me accordingly.

Leaving me to the care of the blackies, he fell to revising the notes he had made on my resuscitation. As I ate of the handsome fare served up to me, confusion began on deck, and from the chanteys of the sailors and the rattling of blocks and tackles I surmised that we were getting under way. What a lark! Off on a cruise with my recluse father into the wide Pacific! Little did I realize, as I laughed to myself, which side the joke was to be on. Aye, had I known, I would have plunged overboard and welcomed the dirty fo'k'sle from which I had just escaped.

I was not allowed on deck till we had sunk the Farallones and the last pilot boat. I appreciated this forethought on the part of my father and made it a point to thank him heartily, in my bluff seaman's manner. I could not suspect that he had his own ends in view, in thus keeping my presence secret to all save the crew. He told me briefly of my rescue by his sailors, assuring me that the obligation was on his side, as my appearance had been most opportune. He had constructed the apparatus for the vindication of a theory concerning certain biological phenomena, and had been waiting for an opportunity to use it.

"You have proved it beyond all doubt," he said; then added with a sigh, "but only in the small matter of drowning."

But, to take a reef in my yarn—he offered me an advance of two pounds on my previous wages to sail with him, and this I considered handsome, for he really did not need me. Contrary to my expectations, I did not join the sailors' mess, for'ard, being assigned to a comfortable stateroom and eating at the captain's table. He had perceived that I was no common sailor, and I resolved to take this chance for reinstating myself in his good graces. I wove a fictitious past to account for my education and present position, and did my best to come in touch with him. I was not long in disclosing a predilection for scientific pursuits, nor he in appreciating my aptitude. I became his assistant, with a corresponding increase in wages, and before long, as he grew confidential and expounded his theories, I was as enthusiastic as himself.

The days flew quickly by, for I was deeply interested in my new studies, passing my waking hours in his well-stocked library, or listening to his plans and aiding him in his laboratory work. But we were forced to forego many enticing experiments, a rolling ship not being exactly the proper place for delicate or intricate work. He promised me, however, many delightful hours in the magnificent laboratory for

which we were bound. He had taken possession of an uncharted South Sea island, as he said, and turned it into a scientific paradise.

We had not been on the island long, before I discovered the horrible mare's nest I had fallen into. But before I describe the strange things which came to pass, I must briefly outline the causes which culminated in as startling an experience as ever fell to the lot of man.

Late in life, my father had abandoned the musty charms of antiquity and succumbed to the more fascinating ones embraced under the general head of biology. Having been thoroughly grounded during his youth in the fundamentals, he rapidly explored all the higher branches as far as the scientific world had gone, and found himself on the no man's land of the unknowable. It was his intention to preempt some of this unclaimed territory, and it was at this stage of his investigations that we had been thrown together. Having a good brain, though I say it myself, I had mastered his speculations and methods of reasoning, becoming almost as mad as himself. But I should not say this. The marvelous results we afterward obtained can only go to prove his sanity. I can but say that he was the most abnormal specimen of cold-blooded cruelty I have ever seen.

After having penetrated the dual mysteries of physiology and psychology, his thought had led him to the verge of a great field, for which, the better to explore, he began studies in higher organic chemistry, pathology, toxicology and other sciences and sub-sciences rendered kindred as accessories to his speculative hypotheses. Starting from the proposition that the direct cause of the temporary and permanent arrest of vitality was due to the coagulation of certain elements and compounds in the protoplasm, he had isolated and subjected these various substances to innumerable experiments. Since the temporary arrest of vitality in an organism brought coma, and a permanent arrest death, he held that by artificial means this coagulation of the protoplasm could be retarded, prevented, and even overcome in the extreme states of solidification. Or, to do away with the technical nomenclature, he argued that death, when not violent and in which none of the organs had suffered injury, was merely suspended vitality; and that, in such instances, life could be induced to resume its functions by the use of proper methods. This, then, was his idea: To discover the method—and by practical experimentation prove the possibility—of renewing vitality in a structure from which life had seemingly fled. Of course, he recognized the futility of such endeavor after decomposition had set in; he must have organisms which but the moment, the hour, or the day before, had been quick with life. With me, in a crude way, he had proved this theory. I was really drowned, really dead, when picked from the water of San Francisco bay—but the vital spark had been renewed by means of his aerotherapeutical apparatus, as he called it.

Now to his dark purpose concerning me. He first showed me how completely I was in his power. He had sent the yacht away for a year, retaining only his two blackies, who were utterly devoted to him. He then made an exhaustive review of his theory and outlined the method of proof he had adopted, concluding with the startling announcement that I was to be his subject.

I had faced death and weighed my chances in many a desperate venture, but never in one of this nature. I can swear I am no coward, yet this proposition of journeying back and forth across the borderland of death put the yellow fear upon me. I asked for time, which he granted, at the same time assuring me that but one course was open—I must submit. Escape from the island was out of the question; escape by suicide was not to be entertained, though really preferable to what it seemed I must undergo; my only hope was to destroy my captors. But this latter was frustrated through the precautions taken by my father. I was subjected to a constant surveillance, even in my sleep being guarded by one or the other of the blacks.

Having pleaded in vain, I announced and proved that I was his son. It was my last card, and I had placed all my hopes upon it. But he was inexorable; he was not a

father but a scientific machine. I wonder yet how it ever came to pass that he married my mother or begat me, for there was not the slightest grain of emotion in his make-up. Reason was all in all to him, nor could he understand such things as love or sympathy in others, except as petty weaknesses which should be overcome. So he informed me that in the beginning he had given me life, and who had better right to take it away than he? Such, he said, was not his desire, however; he merely wished to borrow it occasionally, promising to return it at the appointed time. Of course, there was a liability of mishaps, but I could do no more than take the chances, since the affairs of men were full of such.

The better to insure success, he wished me to be in the best possible condition, so I was dieted and trained like a great athlete before a decisive contest. What could I do? If I had to undergo the peril, it were best to be in good shape. In my intervals of relaxation he allowed me to assist in the arranging of the apparatus and in the various subsidiary experiments. The interest I took in all such operations can be imagined. I mastered the work as thoroughly as he, and often had the pleasure of seeing some of my suggestions or alterations put into effect. After such events I would smile grimly, conscious of officiating at my own funeral.

He began by inaugurating a series of experiments in toxicology. When all was ready, I was killed by a stiff dose of strychnine and allowed to lie dead for some twenty hours. During that period my body was dead, absolutely dead. All respiration and circulation ceased; but the frightful part of it was, that while the protoplasmic coagulation proceeded, I retained consciousness and was enabled to study it in all its ghastly details.

The apparatus to bring me back to life was an air-tight chamber, fitted to receive my body. The mechanism was simple—a few valves, a rotary shaft and crank, and an electric motor. When in operation, the interior atmosphere was alternately condensed and rarefied, thus communicating to my lungs an artificial respiration without the agency of the hosing previously used. Though my body was inert, and, for all I knew, in the first stages of decomposition, I was cognizant of everything that transpired. I knew when they placed me in the chamber, and though all my senses were quiescent, I was aware of hypodermic injections of a compound to react upon the coagulatory process. Then the chamber was closed and the machinery started. My anxiety was terrible; but the circulation became gradually restored, the different organs began to carry on their respective functions, and in an hour's time I was eating a hearty dinner.

It cannot be said that I participated in this series, nor in the subsequent ones, with much verve; but after two ineffectual attempts at escape, I began to take quite an interest. Besides, I was becoming accustomed. My father was beside himself at his success, and as the months rolled by his speculations took wilder and yet wilder flights. We ranged through the three great classes of poisons, the neurotics, the gaseous and the irritants, but carefully avoided some of the mineral irritants and passed the whole group of corrosives. During the poison régime I became quite accustomed to dying, and had but one mishap to shake my growing confidence. Scarifying a number of lesser blood vessels in my arm, he introduced a minute quantity of that most frightful of poisons, the arrow poison, or curare. I lost consciousness at the start, quickly followed by the cessation of respiration and circulation, and so far had the solidification of the protoplasm advanced, that he gave up all hope. But at the last moment he applied a discovery he had been working upon, receiving such encouragement as to redouble his efforts.

In a glass vacuum, similar but not exactly like a Crookes' tube, was placed a magnetic field. When penetrated by polarized light, it gave no phenomena of phosphorescence nor of rectilinear projection of atoms, but emitted non-luminous rays, similar to the X ray. While the X ray could reveal opaque objects hidden in dense mediums, this was possessed of far subtler penetrations. By this he photographed my body, and

found on the negative an infinite number of blurred shadows, due to the chemical and electric motions still going on. This was an infallible proof that the rigor mortis in which I lay was not genuine; that is, those mysterious forces, those delicate bonds which held my soul to my body, were still in action. The resultants of all other poisons were unapparent, save those of mercurial compounds, which usually left me languid for several days.

Another series of delightful experiments was with electricity. We verified Tesla's assertion that high currents were utterly harmless by passing 100,000 volts through my body. As this did not affect me, the current was reduced to 2,500, and I was quickly electrocuted. This time he ventured so far as to allow me to remain dead, or in a state of suspended vitality, for three days. It took four hours to bring me back.

Once, he superinduced lockjaw; but the agony of dying was so great that I positively refused to undergo similar experiments. The easiest deaths were by asphyxiation, such as drowning, strangling, and suffocation by gas; while those by morphine, opium, cocaine and chloroform, were not at all hard.

Another time, after being suffocated, he kept me in cold storage for three months, not permitting me to freeze or decay. This was without my knowledge, and I was in a great fright on discovering the lapse of time. I became afraid of what he might do with me when I lay dead, my alarm being increased by the predilection he was beginning to betray toward vivisection. The last time I was resurrected, I discovered that he had been tampering with my breast. Though he had carefully dressed and sewed the incisions up, they were so severe that I had to take to my bed for some time. It was during this convalescence that I evolved the plan by which I ultimately escaped.

While feigning unbounded enthusiasm in the work, I asked and received a vacation for my moribund occupation. During this period I devoted myself to laboratory work, while he was too deep in the vivisection of the many animals captured by the blacks to take notice of my work.

It was on these two propositions that I constructed my theory: First, electrolysis, or the decomposition of water into its constituent gases by means of electricity; and, second, by the hypothetical existence of a force, the converse of gravitation, which Astor has named "apergy." Terrestrial attraction, for instance, merely draws objects together but does not combine them; hence, apergy is merely repulsion. Now, atomic or molecular attraction not only draws objects together but integrates them; and it was the converse of this, or a disintegrative force, which I wished to not only discover and produce, but to direct at will. Thus the molecules of hydrogen and oxygen reacting on each other, separate and create new molecules, containing both elements and forming water. Electrolysis causes these molecules to split up and resume their original condition, producing the two gases separately. The force I wished to find must not only do this with two, but with all elements, no matter in what compounds they exist. If I could then entice my father within its radius, he would be instantly disintegrated and sent flying to the four quarters, a mass of isolated elements.

It must not be understood that this force, which I finally came to control, annihilated matter; it merely annihilated form. Nor, as I soon discovered, had it any effect on inorganic structure; but to all organic form it was absolutely fatal. This partiality puzzled me at first, though had I stopped to think deeper I would have seen through it. Since the number of atoms in organic molecules is far greater than in the most complex mineral molecules, organic compounds are characterized by their instability and the ease with which they are split up by physical forces and chemical reagents.

By two powerful batteries, connected with magnets constructed specially for this purpose, two tremendous forces were projected. Considered apart from each other, they were perfectly harmless; but they accomplished their purpose by focusing at an invisible point in mid-air. After practically demonstrating its success, besides narrowly escaping being blown into nothingness, I laid my trap. Concealing the magnets, so

that their force made the whole space of my chamber doorway a field of death, and placing by my couch a button by which I could throw on the current from the storage batteries, I climbed into bed.

The blackies still guarded my sleeping quarters, one relieving the other at midnight. I turned on the current as soon as the first man arrived. Hardly had I begun to doze, when I was aroused by a sharp, metallic tinkle. There, on the mid-threshold, lay the collar of Dan, my father's St. Bernard. My keeper ran to pick it up. He disappeared like a gust of wind, his clothes falling to the floor in a heap. There was a slight whiff of ozone in the air, but since the principal gaseous components of his body were hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, which are equally colorless and odorless, there was no other manifestation of his departure. Yet when I shut off the current and removed the garments, I found a deposit of carbon in the form of animal charcoal; also other powders, the isolated, solid elements of his organism, such as sulphur, potassium and iron. Resetting the trap, I crawled back to bed. At midnight I got up and removed the remains of the second blacky, and then slept peacefully till morning.

I was awakened by the strident voice of my father, who was calling to me from across the laboratory. I laughed to myself. There had been no one to call him and he had overslept. I could hear him as he approached my room with the intention of rousing me, and so I sat up in bed, the better to observe his translation—perhaps apotheosis were a better term. He paused a moment at the threshold, then took the fatal step. Puff! It was like the wind sighing among the pines. He was gone. His clothes fell in a fantastic heap on the floor. Besides ozone, I noticed the faint, garlic-like odor of phosphorous. A little pile of elementary solids lay among his garments. That was all. The wide world lay before me. My captors were not.

Jack London - - - The Story of a Story

(*Continued from page 2*)

Sub-scissors, I imagine) that my story was 'available' and that on publication I would be paid for it the sum of five dollars.

"The end was in sight. I was finished—finished as only a very young, very sick and very hungry young man could be. And then, that same day, that very afternoon, the mail brought a short, thin letter from Mr. Umbstaetter of THE BLACK CAT. He told me that the four thousand word story submitted to him was more lengthy than strengthy, but that if I would give permission to cut it in half, he would immediately send me a check for forty dollars

"I told Mr. Umbstaetter he could cut it down two halves if he would only send the money along. He did, by return mail. And that is precisely why I stayed by the writing game. Literally, and literarily, I was saved by THE BLACK CAT short story.

"To many a writer with a national reputation THE BLACK CAT has been the stepping stone. The marvelous, unthinkable thing Mr. Umbstaetter did, was to judge a story on its merits and to pay for it on its merits. Also, and only a hungry writer can appreciate it, he paid immediately on acceptance."

That is the story of the story which marked the genesis of Jack London's career as one of America's most robust writers. We republish "A Thousand Deaths" as the first story this month and dedicate this number to the memory of Jack London, the author, and to the memory of H. D. Umbstaetter, the editor who gave him a hand.

BY SUBTERFUGE

BY H. P. HOLT

Forced into the ranks of vagabond navigators because of a series of costly misadventures with other men's ships, a hoodooed skipper casts his lot with a choice crew of cosmopolitan cut-throats.

HE day had passed when Captain Scarlett hoped to be skipper of a first-class liner. He had had unlimited ambition in that direction during his younger days, but circumstances were against him. His first command hit an uncharted rock off Haiti after the owners had threatened him with dismissal if he did not arrive on time. As his ship sank he failed to arrive on time, and he consequently kicked his heels in New York for a couple of months, looking in vain for another confiding employer. Even his overcoat had been converted into current coin of the realm when he succeeded in getting signed on for a meagre salary as third mate; for, whereas an agile and intelligent camel might conceivably squeeze through the eye of a needle if the needle were large enough, a man holding an extra master's certificate and a bad record may tramp round among reputable shipping offices till his legs are but stumps before he finds anyone willing to entrust his floating property to him. If the pendulum of his luck always swings one way after that, the mariner may possibly regain the confidence of employers in the course of half a lifetime, but Captain Scarlett's luck was erratic. Black fever carried off most of the ship's officers near Para, and he found himself pacing the bridge, monarch of all he surveyed, during the homeward run.

He was just beginning to think that fate had something in store for him besides kicks, when his vessel was rammed by a steamer during a dense fog off Sandy Hook, and for twenty hideous minutes he was busy averting a series of impromptu funerals. As a matter of course, Captain Scarlett's "previous convictions" were raked up, and once more the unfortunate skipper did his bit toward swelling the ranks of the unemployed. For some time afterward his life was persistently uninteresting and colourless. He knew his business thoroughly; had no vices other than a taste for black cigars; and he had a wonderfully persuasive way with men when a critical situation cropped up. There was no lingo spoken on the wide ocean in which he could not curse dagos if necessary, and no man who had any respect for his own health would have paused lightheartedly to question an order of his. Captain Scarlett stood six-foot-three, had a chest like a young elephant, and usually wore thick-soled boots.

Still, he had been unlucky, and there are always far more good skippers wanting berths than there are third-rate berths needing good skippers. Scarlett had to do many humiliating things rather than starve, for a long time. Under a name that would have surprised his god-parents, he sailed before the mast, thereby, on one occasion, scandalizing a cook who had had the honour, in other days, of attending to the needs of his interior. Indiscreetly, the cook mentioned the matter to Scarlett, who found it necessary to give two distinct hammerings to the cook before the latter felt convinced he must have made some mistake.

Although Captain Scarlett fulfilled mean duties for the necessities of existence, he never failed to keep his weather eye open for one of the softer spots in life. The world is a comparatively big place, and even after the front door is banged in a skipper's face there are sometimes opportunities for him to creep round to the

back entrance. The qualifications for admission via the back entrance are at times varied and peculiar, and the back entrance often takes a great deal of finding; but a persistent seeker can do astonishing things on this earth if he has a square jaw like that of Captain Scarlett and a growing family in an unpretentious villa at Boston to provide for. The unfortunate skipper found himself in an awkward hole many a time when his remittance to Laburnum Villa became due, and he often swore in a subdued tone when he realized how pitifully small the remittance would have to be, compared with what he would have liked to send. There were moments when he felt like standing in a dark corner, braining the first person who came along and including the proceeds with his remittance, but such moods passed quickly. He was too deeply attached to the little brood of Scarletts to picture them living on such tainted wealth.

For a while he prowled about the region of the Congo in various craft, hoping against hope to get command of one of the numerous small trading steamers that survive the myriad of pitfalls there by a series of miracles, but fever seemed to be having an off season just then. At least, if anyone died after an overdose of the odour of crushed marigolds, somebody else with an equal disregard for a free passage to the hereafter succeeded in getting the job before Scarlett had time to arrive on the scene.

One night he was bitterly summing up the disadvantages of being alive, wondering where he would be able to sleep, and watching the lights glint on the swiftly flowing tide at Durban, when a strange thing happened. There came over the water a curious scraping sound as of a small boat running foul of a buoy, an inarticulate scream of horror, and then silence. It happened so quickly and so unobtrusively that, for an instant, the skipper thought it must have been fancy, but he knew that neither seagull nor any other bird could have put such agony into a scream. There was a boat lying idle near, and in ten seconds he was thrusting it with all his gigantic strength across the face of the dark water. With a sailor's instinct he made for the place from which the sound had come, grazed past a huge buoy, and in another instant would have gone if something white had not caught his eye.

His ham-like fist grasped a rusty chain attached to the tilted buoy. Bracing himself, he bore the strain as the boat, dragging in the current, tugged to get free, and then with his other hand he groped for the white thing he had seen. It closed over something soft and cold, and a moment later, Captain Scarlett dragged out of the depths the form of a man who was three-quarters drowned.

With a few rapid strokes he pulled to the quay and then, to save precious time, set to work in the boat to coax life back into the victim. It was twenty minutes before the man sat up and wondered vaguely which world he was in.

"What's happened?" he asked.

Scarlett grinned.

"If you don't know, nobody does," he replied. "I found you out there clinging to a buoy as though it were the only friend you had."

"Yes, I remember some of it now. But what happened to Barnes?"

"And who might Barnes be?"

"He's the captain—captain of my ship, the Dorothy. He was coming ashore with me when—when something or other happened."

"I expect you hit the buoy and turned over in the tide. As near as I can calculate, Mr. Barnes is now about three miles out there," Scarlett said grimly, pointing into the blackness. "Unless he's a first-class swimmer someone will be entitled to draw his insurance."

"I always suspected that man was either a fool or a knave," commented the half-drowned person bitingly. "If he wasn't competent to row his owner ashore at Durban he certainly wasn't competent to—well,—well, if he's gone, he's gone. Meanwhile it doesn't break any ice to sit here shivering. I had better get back on board and change. Do you think you could make a better job of it than Barnes did? That's the Dorothy over there, with the riding light."

"I *might*," observed Scarlett with a touch of scorn, but glad of a chance to pick up anything that was going. A little later he had rowed the borrowed boat out across the tideway and was holding on to the side of the Dorothy.

"You had better tie her up there for a few minutes and come on board," said the man. "I reckon I'm in your debt pretty considerably."

Captain Scarlett guessed, as he made his way below, that the Dorothy was somewhere in the neighborhood of a 2000 ton boat. He had visions of being able to send a more satisfactory remittance to Laburnum Villa this time.

"I'm sure I'm mightily obliged to you," said the stranger, after changing into dry clothing and running his eyes keenly over the mariner, not omitting to notice an absence of any sign of prosperity. "You don't happen to be looking for a job, eh?"

"That's just what I am doing," was the reply. "My name is Scarlett. I hold an extra master's ticket."

"Then what in the name of thunder are you doing here at Durban out of collar?"

"I came out on spec, looking for a fortune, and found another fool had been here before me," commented Scarlett drily.

"Hum!" said the other man, after a slight pause. He was thinking hard. "Do you know these waters, Captain?"

"I ought to. I've been poking about in 'em long enough."

"Yes, yes, quite so," was the reply. "My name is Newman. It is unfortunate that Barnes is gone. It he doesn't turn up in the morning I should like to have a chat with you. I intended to sail tomorrow. You had better turn into his bunk for tonight unless you want to get ashore."

Captain Scarlett slept with an easier mind than he had had for a long time. Things seemed to be coming his way. As he had supposed, Barnes did not return to the ship. Mr. Newman was favourably impressed by his visitor's appearance in the daylight, and as there was a shipping office in Durban where Scarlett was known, Mr. Newman was able to make formal inquiries quickly. The mariner had a pleasant surprise, also, when he found that the individual who nursed the Dorothy's engines was a dour Scot, one Sandy Learoyd, with whom he had sailed years before. He knew Sandy to be a man with a powerful thirst and an infinite affection for his work.

Thrusting a little wad of money into Scarlett's hand, as a token of gratitude for services rendered, Mr. Newman engaged the mariner in place of the late lamented Barnes and, in the seclusion of the owner's cabin, Captain Scarlett learned what lay in store. The trip, it appeared, was a pure gamble. Newman had made one of those perilous investments which consist of buying a wreck without seeing it. The steamer Loango had ended her career on the uninviting coast of southwest Madagascar and, although there was bar gold to the value of 400,000 dollars in her, two attempts at salvage had failed utterly. The hull had been pounded by a succession of southerly gales until, in all reason, one could only suppose any treasure on board must have been swept away and, according to the latest reports available, the remnants of the Loango had slipped off the ledge where she struck and sunk in deep water. Highly speculative, was a mild way of describing the investment, but Newman had secured the services of one of the cleverest divers alive and chartered the Dorothy in a purely sporting spirit. He had made three fortunes and lost two. That left him one to the good. He considered, therefore, that he was entitled to take some risks.

"What sort of a crew have we?" asked Scarlett.

"A bit mixed," replied Newman. "The fact is,—they were scraped together in a hurry, but they don't count a lot. This is the fine weather season. Everything, really, depends on Mason, the diver. Kalmar, the mate, is a Swede. He is a rough sort, but I guess he'll be able to keep order. There are 43 hands including the stokers, and they've drifted from every corner of the globe. There's a Chink, two Portugees, a Kanaka or two, a man who says he is from Santa Cruz, a big one-eyed sailor from Barbados, and the rest are the usual scum, but Kalmar has them well in hand."

"I see," said Captain Scarlett dubiously. "And may I ask whether they think this is a pleasure trip we're bound on, or do they know that the stuff Mason hopes to pull up is worth a murder or two?"

"Nobody knows it is gold, except you, Mason and myself."

"That is just as well," observed the skipper, "if you aren't keen on seeing trouble. Personally, I'd have had a crew of Christians on a job like this, because you can get some idea which way a white man is going to jump, but a bunch of trouble like these would take some holding if they saw a fair chance to scoop the pool. I take it the ship is in ballast?"

"The hold aft is," replied Newman. "All the equipment, stores, and spare rations, in case we are away a long time, are in the for'a'd hold. Mason is going to blow the wreck up if necessary, so there is enough dynamite, besides other explosives, under the hatches there, to reduce the Dorothy to little splinters if it happens to go off. Kalmar caught a couple of the dagos smoking in the hold three days ago while we were taking in stores and, when I told him what might have happened, he explained to them forcibly what would be the result of a fire. They looked as scared as rats in a trap, and some of them would have tried to swim ashore if Kalmar hadn't kept his eyes open. They're mortal skeered of that explosive now."

Learning that the ship's armory consisted of one automatic, which Newman had locked up in his trunk, Scarlett went ashore and secured a couple of business-like looking weapons, handing one to Sandy with instructions to him to keep it ready in case of unexpected squalls. The same evening the Dorothy dropped her moorings and ambled under easy steam into the Indian Ocean, heading for the all-important point on the chart about 300 miles to the north of Cape St. Marie, where the Madagascan rocks had claimed toll of the Loango. Newman, who was an optimist by nature, refused to allow his spirits to droop when no trace of the wreck could be found at first. His faith in Captain Scarlett had grown every day, and as there was no particular reason for hurrying, he decided to take the skipper's advice and carry out a systematic search in the neighborhood.

Feeling blindly under water for bits of a wreck that was once somewhere about there, is the sort of work that demands grit after the novelty has worn off, but Newman stuck to it and, in less than three weeks, Mason reported that he had located the lost Loango. She had slipped off the ledge and, instead of dropping like a stone into the deep water, had drifted onto a rocky bed at a depth which, though considerable, was not too great to give the diver a chance. He could, however, only stand being down for a few minutes at a time, and the days dragged monotonously while he was endeavouring to locate the treasure. Many tons of sand had silted over the part of the ship that he was exploring, and it took him more than a week to get this clear.

Finally, he came to the surface wildly excited. He had reached the place where the gold was stored. There was a great hole near, in the side of the Loango, but the treasure boxes had been kept in position by their own weight. Mason had fixed a guide rope leading to the place and, while he was resting, Scarlett made a trip down.

"Barring bad weather, which isn't likely," he reported to Newman, "we ought to have the whole lot on board in ten days or so. We had better store it in my cabin and you'll have to come and occupy the spare berth there. There is plenty of room and, if these heathen get wind of what the game is, it will be necessary to keep our blinkers open. I wouldn't trust Kalmar as far as I could throw him."

Fortunately the sea remained as calm as a mill pond excepting for the long, steady swell, and the work of getting the gold boxes up was continued without a hitch until a piece of rotten tackle gave way. One of the boxes, weighing as much as a man could lift, crashed on to the deck, narrowly missing the Chinaman and, falling on its corner, burst open. All hands had been as curious as a drove of monkeys to know what mysterious substance was being pulled from the bottom of the sea with

such care and, when the little yellow bars dropped out on deck, Kalmar and the Chinaman were among the first two to inspect them closely before Scarlett's burly shoulder intervened. He saw a quick look exchanged by Kalmar and the Chinaman, as though their suspicions had been verified, but it was not until next day that he felt convinced any danger lay ahead. All hands had begun to work in a curiously feverish spirit, displaying an interest in the proceedings which was ominous. When the skipper paid a surprise visit to the fo'c'sle that night, a babel of tongues struck his ears and he listened intently. At first he hoped it was only the natural outcome of excitement caused by the discovery, but the few phrases he caught were sinister.

"Gettee all up first. Muchee plenty for everyone," was one observation which fell from the Chinaman. Captain Scarlett had food for deep thought as he crept back unobserved. That trouble was brewing, and bad trouble at that, he had no room for doubt. Of the whole ship's company there were none on whose loyalty Newman and he could count besides Sandy Learoyd and the diver. Four men, even armed as three of them would be, would be sure of a distinctly exciting time when the storm broke, for more than two score lawless ruffians with unlimited wealth almost within their grasp, would need scientific handling. Captain Scarlett had not the faintest yellow streak in his composition, but he had grave misgivings about the position. For a moment his mind strayed to the corner chair in the parlour at Laburnum Villa where, at rare intervals, he smoked black cigars and listened to the little tragedies and comedies of his domestic circle. Then he came back to the grim realities of the moment and called a council of war.

"If they catch us napping, or separated," the skipper declared, "the only satisfaction we shall get is to pump lead into the hides of a few of them before we are knifed and slung overboard. Of course we shall have to finish getting the rest of this gold up. That's our job for the time being."

"I leave that entirely to your discretion, Captain," said Newman. "It would be hard luck to lose the treasure at this stage, but you can count on me now as only one of your side."

While the rest of the salvage operations lasted there was no open sign of defiance, but the subtle danger signals were there to read. It was agreed not to give any indication to the enemy that the diver's task was nearing completion. The last box was being stored away when an idea occurred to the skipper. The dagos must already have settled on some definite plan of campaign. If he could ascertain what the program was, as they had arranged it, half his difficulties would be removed. He scratched his chin reflectively for a moment and then picked on Jim, the one-eyed individual from Barbados. Hoisting a finger at the negro, he turned toward his cabin, beckoning Newman as he went. After they had entered he closed the door and Jim suddenly stepped backward in astonishment from a polished barrel that was pointed directly at his cranium.

"You going to die, one-time quick, Jim," snapped Scarlett.

"Why for, boss?" gasped the negro.

"You not an honest nigger. You meant to steal white man's gold, eh? You know what gold is, you dirty black scum."

For an instant something that was either guilt or terror quivered in Jim's face.

"No, boss. Me the one only honest nigger on board," he whined, and a triumphant light came into Scarlett's eyes, for he not only saw that Jim was lying but that the negro was aware of the men's plans.

"We'll see," commented Scarlett, without taking the weapon from Jim's forehead. "Mr. Newman, you'll find some fine wire in that locker. Oblige me by running a noose of it over each of this heathen's thumbs. That's right. Now," he added fiercely to Jim, "if you squeal out once this gun will go off and you are a dead man, see? Lie down."

Puzzled and terrified, Jim sprawled on his back, and two more nooses were placed on his great toes. Acting under definite instructions, Newman tied the wires to a hook overhead just tighly enough to leave the victim's elbows and heels off the floor of the cabin. As long as Jim held his limbs up he felt no pain. As soon as he drooped,

the wires would inflict exquisite agony. Scarlett, without speaking again, left him lying in that position long enough to find out the degree of torture he was likely to arrive at, and when beads of perspiration were standing on the man's brow he knelt down.

"You stop there all day and all night, savvy, until you tell me what I want to know," Scarlett informed him.

Jim groaned. His legs and arms were growing weary and the wire was beginning to do its work.

"Me honest nigger," he said. "Me tell boss one-time quick."

Scarlett eased the wire strands and Jim rolled his eyes in misery.

"What had you and the rest of the scum decided to do, eh?" the skipper asked, bringing Jim back to his senses with the aid of his toe.

"Me good nigger," wailed the captive. "Other boys set ship on fire, go ashore in boats and take gold. Ship go off bang and nobody tell."

A shade of pallor crept over Newman's face. He had been willing to face ten to one in a fight, but this revelation put a different complexion on matters.

"All right. You good nigger. Get out of this," Scarlett commanded.

"Is it safe to let him go?" Newman asked; at which the captain smiled oddly.

"He'll keep his mouth shut to save his own skin," was the reply. "I'm going to see Sandy Learoyd. You'd better slip up onto the bridge, Mr. Newman, and keep a look out for trouble of any kind, but take your gun with you."

For an hour Newman waited, expecting anything and everything to happen at any moment. The strain was beginning to tell on him when, to his horror, he saw smoke curling up from the hatchway for'ard.

Like a flash he leaped down the companion, shouting for Scarlett, and the crew standing near stared at the smoke for a moment as if stupified.

"Buckets and the pump, quick, Kalmar," roared the captain. "Get a move on 'em or we'll all be blown sky high."

The rest of the crew came tumbling out of the fo'c'sle head and grasped the danger in a second. The one thing they did respect on board, above all others, was the collection of explosives in the hold. There was a wild scramble for the boats, in which Kalmar joined, for the smoke was growing denser. Scarlett bellowed at the men, but they swept past like a stampede of bullocks. Some of them jumped overboard in sheer frenzy. The crew lowered or capsized all the boats but one, and into this Scarlett hustled Newman, Sandy and Mason, while the deserting scum headed for the Madagascan coast out of the danger zone. They were all some distance off when Scarlett brought his boat round quickly and made for the Dorothy again. He leaped over the side, followed by Sandy. Newman and Mason would have demanded some explanation, but the skipper and engineer were in too great a hurry for words.

"Tie that boat alongside and come on board," was all Scarlett said as he disappeared. A few moments later they heard the jarring noise of the winch heaving on the anchor. The moment it was clear the engines started and the skipper turned the Dorothy's head to sea.

Sandy poked his nose up over the grating leading down to the engine room.

"I'm thinkin' it would be just as weel to put that fire oot. It gives me the shudders," he shouted to the captain.

"Yes, it'll be safe to do that now," replied Scarlett. "Mr. Newman and Mason will give you a hand."

Sandy scrambled down into the hold for'ard, holding a piece of cotton waste to his mouth, and reached up to the others four buckets, each of which was emitting clouds of evil-smelling smoke. It was a mixture which Sandy and Scarlett had prepared with the greatest care, for there was no flame, and the Scot grinned as it was thrown overboard.

"We shall be three days or thereabouts in making Beira," shouted Scarlett from the bridge, "so if you gentlemen don't mind slipping below, taking your coats off, and helping Sandy with his box of tricks—"

Before taking on the role of fireman, Newman paused long enough to say a word which caused Scarlett to renew his faith in the ultimate prosperity of Laburnum Villa.

A REAL SPORT

BY HAPSBURG LIEBE

An old soldier wins a bet (not a common election bet, but a rarer bird, a wager on life). Incidentally, the shroud is torn from the still-warm corpse of an old love affair; and the veteran decides to seek out a girl he used to know.

THOMAS WILDMAN, one of the nurses in the hospital of a home for old and disabled volunteer soldiers, looked around quickly. Someone had called to him.

"It's me," said a thin voice—"over 'ere: Old Billy Light."

Nurse Wildman hastened across the ward. "What is it, Billy?"

"You see him?" Light jerked a withered thumb toward a huge and gaunt gray-haired giant who lay in a narrow white bed that stood to the left of his own narrow white bed. "Well, I want you to move me closer to him. We was boyhood friends up in New York State, me and Jonathan Langstree was, and we want to talk to each other about old times. You don't mind, do you, nursey?"

"It'll be all right, Billy, so long as you don't talk too much—nor too loud," smiled Nurse Wildman.

He moved Old Billy's bed until its rail touched the rail of Langstree's bed, and went away. Old Billy turned slightly under the white coverlet, and his wizened, good-natured mouth spread in a good-natured grin. He was a little man, smooth-faced, with kindly blue eyes; his hair was perfectly white, and not so thin as that of most old men.

"You're glad to see me again, aren't you, Jonathan?" he said, in a voice that was weak in spite of himself.

Langstree stared, and his cold gray eyes expressed no pleasure. Langstree believed that he had a great reason for hating Billy Light, in whose company a capricious Fate had thrown him for more than half of his life's journey.

"Better let me do most of the talkin'," Light went on, "because you're worse off than I am, I guess. Do you remember, Jonathan, when we was boys together up in New York State—"

"I'm no worse off than you!" snapped Langstree, childishly. He knew that his was a serious illness, and that the chances were many against his surviving it, and he had grown very bitter about it. Light had unconsciously touched a sore spot. Langstree had always been a narrow, mean man; and yet, there had always been something of the high-class dare-devil in him. He continued hotly:

"How much sporting blood is there in you, Billy Light?"

"I don't know, Jonathan," smilingly. "Not very much, I guess. But why do you ask me that, Jonathan, old friend?"

"You say I'm worse off than you," growled Langstree. "I'll lay you a wager of all the money I've got against all the money you've got that *I will live longer than you!*"

Old Billy laughed weakly. "Ah, that was always you, Jonathan! You was always the sport, the dead game sport, wasn't you? And now you're wanting to bet all the money you've got against all the money I've got that you'll live longer than me; eh, Jonathan? I remember very well, we're both the same age—sixty-nine. It seems a little foolish, Jonathan, but—if it will please you, we'll lay the wager."

He turned his white head and called to Nurse Wildman. Wildman put down a glass of water and came at once.

"In my clothes you'll find a little money, and in Jonathan's clothes you'll find a little money," Old Billy said to the nurse. "Me and Jonathan is bettin' on who'll live the longest. We want you to get the money,

and act as stakeholder, nursey; will you?"

Wildman laughed queerly. It was altogether a new experience for him. But he agreed to hold the stakes.

Billy Light faced back to the man who had been the companion of his boyhood and the comrade of his four years in the Union army. Langstree lay tugging nervously at his full beard; only his upper lip was shaven, and it was broad and thin and hard.

"You always was the dead game sport, wasn't you, Jonathan?" Old Billy ran on garrulously. "At the old swimmin' hole you used to dive out of a tree and beat us all, didn't you? And you could ride the fieriest colt! My, my, but to me you was a real hero, Jonathan! Do you remember the time we blacked our faces and went beggin' and ate only the pies and tarts?"

Langstree said nothing. He kept tugging nervously at his full gray beard. Old Billy continued pleasantly: "And do you remember the time—that Hallowe'en—when we filled the schoolhouse full of pigs and chickens and farmin' machinery, and tied a big brass bell to Farmer Henderson's stallion's tail? My, my! He! He! He! How that horse did run from the big brass bell! He'd have been running yet, I guess, if something hadn't stopped him. It was the same Hallowe'en that Micky Sanderson fell and broke an arm while tryin' to get a four-horse loggin' wagon on top of the Methodist church—don't you remember, Jonathan?"

Still Langstree said nothing. But he frowned and rubbed his broad, thin, hard upper lip reflectively. Old Billy went on:

"And then there was Mary, that we both loved nigh to madness. I gave up like a man, when she married you, though it fairly cut the heart of me in pieces—didn't I? I'll never forget that night when I first got the news of the weddin'. If anybody but my own mother had told me, I'd not have believed it. I just slumped down in the closest chair and sat there until the sun rose, and somehow I didn't know anything much about the passin' of the night. I never married because I never loved anybody else, Jonathan. I'd never thought you'd come to a home for old and disabled soldiers as long as you had an angel like Mary in your house. Jonathan, man, it—it can't be that she's dead!"

At this, Langstree raised himself upon an elbow, and it required an effort. His old face worked, and his old eyes blazed with his insane hatred for Billy Light.

"I haven't seen her for twenty years!" he growled. "She left me. There never was any children. She loved you all the time. I lied about you before we was married, and that's how it happened that she married me and not you! I don't mind telling you. I think I'd like to kill you, Billy Light! I've hated you for so long that—that I—"

His voice failed him and he sank back to his pillow.

"Why—why, Jonathan!" Old Billy cried smotheredly.

He was not quick to realize that the woman he had loved for almost a whole lifetime had loved him for almost a whole lifetime. But when the realization came it made him supremely happy. All the longing of his lonely years had not been for nothing, for Mary had loved him during all those years. He was not angry at Jonathan Langstree. Rather, he pitied Langstree because Mary had never loved him. He wished that he knew just where to find Mary.

Suddenly he looked toward Langstree. "It's all right, Jonathan, old friend," he said with great gentleness. "For the lies I can forgive you. Mary still loves me, and there is nothin' else that matters very much. Twenty years apart from you makes her no longer your wife. Will you tell me where I'd be most apt to find her?"

The huge and gaunt gray-haired giant rose again on his elbow. Unreasoning rage flashed like powderfire in his eyes.

"I don't want your forgiveness!" he cried hoarsely. "I don't—want—your—forgiveness!"

He fell back, straightened in bed, gasped, and lay still.

"Nursey!" cried Old Billy, alarmed. "Nursey! Over 'ere—quick with you—over 'ere!"

But Wildman could do nothing. Langstree had lost the wager that he himself had proposed.

When they carried Langstree out, Old Billy hardly knew it. When, a little later, Nurse Wildman dropped the wager money to the coverlet beside him, Old Billy was hardly aware of it. Mary had been loving him all the time, and nothing else mattered. If only he knew where to find Mary! He would go to her as soon as he got well. Sixty-nine—that wasn't so old, was it? Mary was only sixty-seven. He told himself that she must be up in New York State with her relatives.

Somehow, he felt better the next morning than he had felt for a long time. Nurse Wildman gave him his blue clothing and escorted him to a chair on the hospital's broad verandah. An hour afterward, when nobody was looking, he stole away and went to a little store that stood close to the north entrance to the grounds.

"See here, Freeling," he said weakly, to the storekeeper. "I've got a boyhood friend bein' buried today, and I want some flowers for him—and I want you to send to a florist over in town and get them for me. I want to pay eight dollars and eighty-four cents for them;—it's all the money I've got, and I won three dollars and two cents of it on a foolish bet. Have the flowers come a little before sundown, will you? I want to take them over to the Circle myself, and it'll be too hot for me if I go before sundown. Here's the money, right here. Say, Freeling, what kind o' shape ought those flowers be in, anyway?"

"An anchor, or a star," suggested the storekeeper, "or a cross."

"That's the best—a cross," decided Old Billy. "Get a cross for me, will you? And the flowers ought to be red and white and blue—for a soldier, you know. But you can't get any blue flowers, maybe;—red and white, then. I'm sure much obliged to you, Freeling."

Freeling went toward a telephone instrument, and Billy Light walked slowly back to the hospital to receive a chiding from Nurse Wildman. But what did Old Billy care for a chiding now?

Langstree was buried that afternoon, and Light, from one of the hospital windows, watched the little procession start. It was very tragic to Billy Light. He was intensely sorry for Langstree. Poor old Jonathan! Mary hadn't loved him at all! Mary had loved only him, Billy Light. What eyes she had had, and what hair, and what red, sweet lips! That her eyes were no longer bright save when they swam in tears, that her hair was thin and gray, that her lips were drawn and withered now—what difference did it make? To him she would be Mary, Mary.

A little before sundown, Billy Light stole away and went to the store that stood not far from the north gate. The cross of flowers had come, and it was bigger and more beautiful even than he had imagined it would be. He took it up to see whether it was heavy; it was, but he meant to carry it to the Circle himself, for all of that. He thanked Freeling, and set out with his burden along the winding road that led through a broad green field and to the burying-ground, which the old soldiers called the Circle because the graves were laid in rings with the faces of the dead turned toward a common center.

Along the way, here and there, now on one side and now on the other, were iron plates set on low iron posts; and cast in the iron of those plates were parts of stanzas taken from a famous poem, of which the first four lines are these:

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldier's last tattoo;
No more on life's parade shall meet
That brave and fallen few—

Old Billy went on with a bare glance at the stirring lines. He knew that poem in iron by heart. The flowery cross grew heavier, and he caught it by a wire at its top and slung it carefully over his back. He met a flashily-dressed young man and a young woman with a painted face, visitors. The young woman stopped and laughed quite hysterically when she saw him. A little farther on he met another young man and another young woman—and the face of this one was not yet painted. When she saw him she cried, and even the young man wiped at his eyes.

Old Billy couldn't help wondering at that. What the devil was there to cry about, any-

way? Didn't Mary love him, and hadn't she always loved him? Why the devil couldn't the whole world be as happy as he was? What was the need of being a cry-baby over nothing? When he had asked of the thin air all those questions, he tried to smile because the thin air could not answer any of them.

The cross of flowers kept growing heavier. He shifted it to keep it from hurting his back so much, and went on, staggering a little—on past the last iron plate, which bore this from the iron poem:

Yon marble minstrel's voiceless stone
In deathless song shall tell
When many a vanished year hath flown
The story how ye fell—

When he stopped at the end of his journey, the golden sun was setting clear. Across a low green hill he saw Old Glory coming down, and to his ears there came faintly the strains of The Star-Spangled Banner. He laid down the flowery cross over the ashes of poor Jonathan Langstree, staggered erect and stood with his head bared until the band had ceased to play. Then he dropped to his knees and began to arrange the cross properly.

"We was boys together, wasn't we, Jonathan, old friend?" he murmured. "Boys together up in old New York State."

Somehow, it had grown dark quicker than usual after sundown. Old Billy struggled to rise. He was going back North to look for his Mary. That her hair was no longer brown, that her lips were withered, that her eyes were bright only when they swam in tears—all that made no difference; to him she would still be Mary, Mary.

Then there came a sweet voice from very near to him:

"Billy!"

He rose easily. The voice called to him again:

"Billy!"

He saw. In spite of the thick darkness that had come so suddenly, he saw. There before him stood Mary, bright-eyed, brown-haired, red-lipped, with her roundish young arms held out for him. She wasn't in New York State after all. He started toward her.

"I'm comin', little girl," he said softly. "I'm comin'—"

Ten minutes later Nurse Wildman knelt beside that which men had called Old Billy Light. With a reverent hand Wildman swept back a lock of snow-white hair that had fallen over one of the half-closed blue eyes. The little old man had smiled all his life, while his heart broke year by year; was it any wonder that he was smiling now, with the broken heart healed and at rest—and with his spirit at Home with the spirit of his Mary, Mary?

"He was a real sport," said Thomas Wildman, brokenly,—"a real sport."

A vagabond named Petey, and a girl named Peggy who has a liking for Petey, a green-checkered mackinaw, an old briar pipe and a red tobacco tin—with these materials and a few more, Louis Schneider has written a captivating story called CONSCIENCE STUFF FOR TWO. You will find it in the February BLACK CAT.

IT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT

BY REX STOUT

In this story, it looks as if smug respectability were about to have sundry dents made in its halo. Risking the loss of his wife's affection and with utter disregard for his neighbors' peace of mind, a man allows himself to become peculiarly enarmored of another woman and elects to play the gay and festive Lothario. Think of that!

I KNEW that she was inaccessible to me. When I first found the thought of her whirling about in my mind, the sensible thing would have been to go to the corner café for a drink and drown the fancy like a man. She belonged to another world, and anything I might do would be like a dog baying at the moon. I knew that; but I entertained the thought and caressed it, encouraged it. I was intoxicated.

I had seen her once or twice before, but from that afternoon on Fifth Avenue dated my obsession. I had come downtown in the subway and stopped off at Forty-second Street on some errand or other, when suddenly she swept into sight. I already knew her by name and reputation, much as you know a famous prima donna or a royal princess. I stopped and stared like a fool, and then, half unconsciously, drawn by an irresistible attraction, turned and followed her. She was dressed fashionably, but in faultless taste; her large dark eyes looked out from under the modish rim of a Doquet straw and her pale oval countenance and curved red lips, contradicting each other, imparted a piquant distinction to her appearance. Men turned to look at her. Knowing that I was making a fool of myself, I nevertheless followed her up the Avenue. Every now and then she stopped to look at a window display, while I stood a few yards away gazing at her from the corner of my eye. It was a senseless performance; I certainly had no thought of accosting her on the street, but I was impelled by an overpowering fascination.

After that the thought of her was constantly in my mind. Wherever I found myself, at the office in the morning, at home at night, on the subway, there was always before me that pale oval face with the red lips, to my torment. I dreamed of our meeting, of addressing her, of those red lips smiling at me in welcome, of the friendly pressure of her hand, and I thought of what I should say and how she would answer me. I composed a thousand speeches and turned each one over and over in my brain to perfect it and make it worthy of her. I was mad.

All that, knowing she was inaccessible, immeasurably above me. Humble as I was and of the poorest connections, the conventional channels were closed to me with insurmountable barriers. But I could not forget her. Heaven knows I tried; but in the end I gave it up, and one evening, gritting my teeth, I said to myself, as I was going home on the elevated:

"Very well, I'll meet her, somehow, and take my chance. Anything will be better than this ceaseless yearning."

My heart felt lighter after this resolution, but by the time I got home I was lost in contemplation of a hundred wild schemes that darted into my mind; so much so that I forgot to kiss my wife as I entered the flat. We had been married only about a year and honeymoon days had scarcely waned. Five minutes later, as I sat in the front room reading the paper, I suddenly remembered and jumped up and hurried to the kitchen, uneasy. My wife stood stirring something on the stove and I stopped and kissed her on the cheek before I noticed that anything was wrong.

She turned around quickly, and I saw tears in her eyes.

In the scene that followed, I was certainly not myself. It was not only that I had forgotten the kiss that evening. My

wife had said not a word during the previous weeks about my preoccupation and brooding, but I learned now that nothing had escaped her notice. She accused me of neglecting her, of ceasing to love her, of being indifferent to her. I confess I acted a perfect ass. I should have told her everything, and she, sensible little woman that she is, would have seen the thing as I did and have done all in her power to help me out of my trouble. But the vanity and stupidity of man are boundless. I hesitated and evaded.

"It's only business, dear," I declared. "I'm worried, that's all."

As a matter of fact, things were very well at the office; but it could not be denied that I was worried. In the end, it was patched over somehow, though that was the most uncomfortable dinner since our marriage.

In the days that followed, I continued revolving in my mind schemes for meeting her—wild, impossible schemes—conceiving and rejecting them in endless succession. Nothing else seemed to matter but her, only her! If I could only speak to her! Only hear her voice and see her smile! Only hear the words that I imagined on her lips! One morning, at my desk in the office, I sat with these thoughts in my brain—they were never absent—quite unconsciously writing her name, over and over, on a sheet of paper, until it was filled. I was lost in my dreams, when suddenly I heard a voice at my elbow:

"What's that for?"

I looked up to find my partner, Harris, gazing in bewilderment at her name scribbled all over the paper. I jerked myself up in my chair and hastily turned the sheet upside down, while I felt the blood rush into my face or out of it, I don't know which.

"What's that for?" he repeated.

Then he saw the expression on my face, and his look of puzzlement changed slowly to one of incredulous understanding as he stood and stared at me. I said nothing, and he stared in silence for a long while.

"You're a damned fool," he said at length, calmly.

"It can be," I retorted and, seizing my hat, I jumped up and left the office.

I wandered about the streets for hours, and though I had several appointments for that day I kept none of them. I was wandering in the light of a glorious vision and was blinded by it. Of course Harris was right: I was a damned fool. But I couldn't help it. I walked at random, not knowing or caring where I went, with her face always before me.

Suddenly I saw her.

It was on Broadway, somewhere in the Thirties, about five o'clock in the afternoon. She was walking uptown, unhurried, with an assured, leisurely step that was, in fact, deceiving; for when I turned and followed her I found that she carried herself along faster than one would think. I threw caution to the winds and marched along almost at her heels. A happy chance came presently to my assistance, or I believe I should have been ass enough to accost her on the street and thereby have utterly ruined myself in her sight.

Luckily my timidity held me back until she had reached Forty-second Street; there she turned west and a few steps from Seventh Avenue entered the lobby of the Stuyvesant Theatre. I was close behind her as she approached the box office; I looked over her shoulder as she purchased two tickets in the orchestra for the performance of "Peaches and Cream" that night, and I noted the numbers on the coupons.

At that moment came my inspiration. I waited till she had disappeared again into the street, then approached the ticket seller.

"One for tonight, orchestra."

He turned to glance over the rack, pulled out a coupon and started to put it in an envelope. Meanwhile, I was studying the chart of the theatre under the slab of glass on the ledge.

"What row is it?" I inquired.

"Fourth. Aisle."

"Got anything in the eleventh, near the centre?"

He nodded, after consulting the rack.

"Right here. Fine seat." He pointed to the location on the chart. We were getting hot.

"I'd prefer the other side, if possible."

He frowned impatiently and mumbled something I didn't catch as he turned again to the rack. Out came another coupon; a quick glance showed me its number. A moment later, I had parted company with a two dollar bill and was emerging into the street with a ticket that called for the seat adjoining those purchased by her.

I didn't go back to the office that evening; I wouldn't even have gone home to dinner but for the necessity of changing my clothes. I forget what lie I told my wife, but it couldn't have been a very good one, for my mind was entirely occupied with the question whether or not to wear a dress suit. I knew that the audience at the Stuyvesant was usually about half and half, and I finally decided on my new grey business sack, for I had no desire to appear in false colors. Anyway, hired dress suits are generally of antiquated model, and I knew her eye would detect it at a glance, accustomed as she was to such things. I wished to give myself every advantage possible.

I had a hard time deciding just what to write, and the idea came to me that it would be better to go down to the office first and use the typewriter; but in the end I went out to a stationery and cigar store for a newspaper wrapper with mucilage on the end and used that. Before I finally copied it, as plainly and neatly as possible, I tried fifty different ways of saying what I wanted to in the fewest words, and even then I wasn't satisfied with it.

I was in an agony of suspense, and not disposed to sit around and talk with my wife till time to go, I went out for a walk. Then the thought struck me that something might happen on the subway to delay me, so I rushed to the station and took the first train downtown. I reached the theatre a little after seven and stood in the lobby till the doors opened. I was the first one seated.

Then I encountered my only difficulty. She had bought two tickets, adjoining mine on the left, but which one would she occupy? It was an even chance that she would occupy the seat next to mine. I felt certain that her companion would be some relative or woman friend, since she had bought the tickets herself. So I took the program from the arm of the seat next to mine and opened it at a page near the back, for I didn't want her to see it before the show began, and I knew that during the first or second intermission she would look through the whole program. They always do. So I pasted the newspaper wrapper on which I had written my appeal in a page near the back. The brown paper stood out conspicuously against the white. I closed the program and replaced it with a feeling that if the thing didn't work it wouldn't be my fault. I had done my best.

I tried to amuse myself by watching the theatre fill up, but I was horribly restless and turned around constantly to see if she were coming. At last she would know my name! At last she would speak to me! For I assured myself that she couldn't be so heartless as to ignore me. She couldn't! As the time passed my restlessness increased to a torment of suspense.

A minute or two before curtain time she arrived. I was watching the aisle to the right, but she came unexpectedly down the other side and was already pushing her way past the row of knees to her seat before I saw her. My heart leaped with joy as I saw that she was in front; she would sit next me, as I had hoped! Behind was her companion, a pleasant-faced lady of fifty-five or so, no doubt her mother, or possibly an aunt.

They had barely time to get seated and take off their wraps before the house darkened and the curtain rose. Out of the corner of my eye I could see her profile, delicate in its severity, and the soft rounded contour of neck and shoulders, her dark fine hair contrasting startlingly with the whiteness of her skin. I haven't the remotest idea about the first act. I scarcely breathed;—so close to her, almost touching her! There in front of us her breath was mingling with mine! And soon she would read my name. She would speak to me. I was a-quiver with excitement and hope. Would they never get through that foolishness on the stage?

Then the curtain, applause, and the house was light again. She spoke to her companion; they discussed the performers. I

was in a fever of impatience. They talked so long that I feared the second act would begin before they finished. Finally she began turning the leaves of her program. She read, "What the Man Will Wear," "The Golfer," and "Here and There." She skimmed over the advertisements, turning the pages more rapidly. I could feel myself trembling in my seat, and suddenly I was aware that she had reached it. She was reading the slip of paper I had pasted in her program. I bit my lips to keep myself steady. She read it a second time, a third. I felt, rather than saw, her swift glance. There was a silence, a rather long silence, and then her voice came:

"Really, this is rather clever."

I turned. Yes, she was speaking to me! I swallowed hard and tried to answer, but couldn't. She saw, and smiled—a divine smile!

She spoke again:

"You wrote this? You put this here?"

I nodded, and stammered, "Yes, I did. Forgive me, but it was the only way." Suddenly my voice came, and I continued swiftly: "No doubt you think it bold and in bad taste, but I have been trying for months to think of some way of meeting you. To one in my humble position the conventional channels were closed. I knew no one that could or would introduce me. I thought of calling on you, but of course you wouldn't have seen me, and you would have been right. So I did this. It was the only way I could think of. I beg you not to be offended."

I stopped, wondering if I had said too much or not enough. But I could see she was smiling; at least she wasn't angry. She read the slip over again. I heard her murmur, "How amusing." No, she wasn't angry. Suddenly she turned to me:

"Really, I think you deserve—well, we'll see. You deserve respect for your originality, at least. Let's see; tomorrow's Thursday. Will you call in the morning at ten—between ten and eleven? Wait—" she smiled—"take this and use it as your card when you come." She tore out the slip I had pasted in her program and handed it to me.

I tried to stammer my thanks; she waved them away smilingly and turned to speak to her companion, who had been regarding us in wondering curiosity. The lights began to go out for the second act. My heart was so full of elation I couldn't sit through such a banal performance; besides, would it not be more delicate not to remain? She might feel obliged to converse with me; might think I expected it; it would be presumptuous. And I wanted to get away to think it over.

I took my hat and coat and edged my way to the aisle. In the outer lobby I put on my coat and hat, took the slip of brown paper, read it over once more and folded it; but before placing it in my pocket, I gaily carried it to my lips. The doorman, standing nearby, stared at me in amazement. Perhaps he would have been still more amazed if he had known what was written on it:

> *"The man sitting on your right is Abe Goldstein, of Harris and Goldstein. They are a new firm without much capital, but they have an original and artistic line with the punch. He only asks a chance to show you."*

And that was the way I became acquainted with Sadie Levine, buyer of ladies' suits for the most exclusive house on Fifth Avenue. Usually it takes years to get an account like that. It happened last night. I called on her this morning and sold her a bill of fourteen different numbers, three of each, for a total of $1,760.50. How's that for a first order?

Next month: SLICKS AND SLICKERS, a western story with a brand new coat of local color.

THE TESTIFICATION OF CYNTHYAN ADAMS

BY NATHAN CLOVER

The element of sincerity is present in the revival inspired testification in about the same proportion that it is in the patent medicine testimonial. Cynthyan's testification was different, not only in the matter of sincerity but in the manner of expression.

MRS. McGILLICUDDY had many peculiarities, the chief one being an inveterate desire of requiring Cynthyan Adams to be upstairs when she was down and downstairs when she was up. It had always been so, ever since that dreadful day when she had, metaphorically speaking, taken to her ample bosom the frightened little orphan whose newly arrived parents had had the exceeding had taste to die in that small town whose papers daily boosted it as the healthiest town in the Union. It had given them nothing beyond typhoid fever and a grudging burial, yet to hear it talk one would have thought that it had at least given them wings to soar with, and a golden perch aloft.

Mrs. McGillicuddy's decision to adopt the child had raised a perfect storm of appreciation in the chapel which she attended, and had resulted in many testimonies as to Sister McGillicuddy's integrity as a woman and godliness as a saint, while the orphan, sitting beside that meek-looking lady, and thus dragged into the blinding light of publicity, was nervously twisting holes in her new black gloves and blinking hard in a vain effort to keep back the tears which would brim over and make criminal marks upon the flat bosom of her new black bombazine dress.

Later, having gone through the ordeal of shaking hands with every soul in the chapel, Cynthyan was led homeward, wondering vaguely whether anyone ever had or ever could have such a tireless tongue as her newly adopted parent, or such an unpleasantly fat, clammy hand. The talk, mostly about a child's duty to its "guardeen" had been far above eight-year-old Cynthyan's head and, beyond a few half-choked wholly blank "Yes, marms," Cynthyan had not ventured. Not that Mrs. McGillicuddy had minded for, in her world, children, especially homeless and moneyless ones, should be seen and not heard. On that maxim she acted, and that night when Cynthyan, tired and heartsick, had begged to be excused from washing dishes soiled by the thirteen hungry boarders, Mrs. McGillicuddy had sternly reminded her that "beggars could not be choosers, and dishes must be washed." So, mounted on a stool and shedding heartbroken tears into the hot soap-suds, Cynthyan Adams had begun "the day's work;"—a day that had begun early in the morning and extended far into the night, leaving no room for play, or school—only drudgery and work. The unaccustomed hardships had cruelly calloused hands and feet, and the hardening of a sore and tender little heart was in progress.

"You've got a good worker there, Mrs. McGillicuddy," an unusually observant boarder had once remarked, to which Mrs. McGillicuddy had acidly and vaguely made answer that "Cynthyan was a girl who needed keeping under."

If seeing is believing, then Cynthyan was indeed "kept under," so far under that sometimes, when kneeling beside her neglected bed to say the childish little prayer her mother had taught her, a passionate desire to go under all together would rise in her soul, but this looked like rebellion towards her guardian and wickedness towards Providence, so it would be passionately pressed down into her overflowing heart.

On Sunday afternoons, Mrs. McGillicuddy retired to take what she called "a

well-earned rest," while Cynthyan washed the dishes. On Sunday night she went to church arrayed in a stiff black silk and a portentous black bonnet with one nodding white feather in it, attended by Cynthyan, in what Mrs. McGillicuddy called becoming, and the rest of the world, dowdy, attire. They sat in a front pew from whence Mrs. McGillicuddy could either conveniently beam upon the young minister during the service, or punctuate his earnest prayers with hollow groans of remorse, which made him feel that he really had no right to raise such strife in a sister's soul nor to so vex a godly spirit.

Cynthyan never groaned, for the simple reason that her "guardeen" did, and once, during revival time, when Mrs. McGillicuddy was stridently proclaiming that she was "one of the ninety and nine," Cynthyan found herself fervently praying that she herself might be classed as one of the hundredth.

"For if *she's* going to heaven," ran the prayer, "oh Lord, don't let me go there!"

"If you'd put it in her heart to give me a lil more time er a few less chores, Lord," ran a later petition, founded on a fervent sermon preached on the text, "Ask and it shall be given," and, her prayer apparently going unheeded, she went prayerless for a week in spite of the prickings of a very active conscience.

She saw little of the boarders who came and went, and when they met the little down-at-heel-drudge, on stairs or in corridors, they gave her scarcely a passing glance. She was so homely, they said. Her hair was red—"carrots" they called it; her figure painfully thin; her skin "sickly" and powdered with freckles; her eyes green, her teeth, though white, were far too large.

The summer she was seventeen was intensely hot. Mrs. McGillicuddy was more merciless, the boarders more numerous, Cynthyan more tired.

"Cynthyan," said Mrs. McGillicuddy, one day, as she stood frying pancakes on the stove, "Cynthyan A-dams!" She always spoke Cynthyan's surname as though it were a curse. "Cynthyan *A-dams!* Do you know you'll be seventeen come July?"

"No, marm," said Cynthyan, meekly.

"Well, you will, an' it's quite time you took to testifyin'."

"Testifyin' what?" asked Cynthyan, absently.

"Testifyin' as to your benefits," sharply.

"Benefits! Why, I ain't got none," was Cynthyan's surprising comment. Mrs. McGillicuddy swelled visibly. Mrs. McGillicuddy, as Cynthyan afterwards tersely put it—"busted"—into speech.

"Cynthyan *A-dams!*" she shrieked. "How dast you say that? How dast you? Ain't you got a roof over your head, ain't you got a bed to lie on? Ain't you got something to eat? Ain't you got a dress to your back, an' a hat to your head, an' stockings to your legs, an' shoes to your feet, ain't you? Ain't you?"

Cynthyan might well have retorted that the roof over her head leaked on to the bed she rarely had time to make; that the something to eat was more often than not either stone-cold or burned to a cinder; that the dress to her back was too tight; the hat a ten-year cast-off of Mrs. McGillicuddy; the stockings so mended that there was little of the original ones left; and the shoes so small,—being a bargain,—that they were almost as painful as the historic boots of Nuremberg, but she didn't. She had roused the sleeping dog, and already regretting it, hoped to lull it to sleep again, so she said meekly, "Yes, marm."

"Very well, then," with a glare, "that's what you've got to testify to come July, and testify you shall, as sure as my name's what it is!"

Late that night, Cynthyan Adams retired to bed with a weight as of the nethermost millstone pressing on her soul. She saw, as in a mirror, the little chapel with its high, old-fashioned windows framing the glory of the evening sky; she saw the rows of giggling young folks; she saw the pews of self-consciously pious elder ones; she saw the earnest young minister exhorting and exhorting; she saw brothers and sisters rising one by one to testify; she saw herself urged to her feet by Mrs. McGillicuddy—she fell in a dejected heap among the tumbled bedclothes.

"Oh, Lord, don't *let* her do it!" she moaned. "Don't! Don't!"

June drew to a close and as July approached, Mrs. McGillicuddy, in the midst of preserving and boarders, began to think of a fresh gown for the double occasion of "revival" and Cynthyan's first testifying.

"And you can hev a new white bow, Cynthyan," she condescended. "It'll look sort of innocent on your black dress, and maybe 'twill touch hearts to repentance."

June ended, July began, and daily, nightly, Cynthyan's burden grew heavier, her terror greater. The hours passed, the days passed, the weeks passed, the "night before" came and—nothing had happened!

"Why, them boarders ain't teched the lobster salad," said Mrs. McGillicuddy, at suppertime. "I'll eat it. I always did hate to see a thing go to waste. Cynthyan, there's some beans in the oven for you."

They retired to rest, and Cynthyan's terror culminating sent her to her knees.

"Lord," she prayed, hands lifted, tears streaming, "oh, Lord! Don't let her do it! Make something happen! Make her sick—Lord—yes, make her sick—and then we'll be stopping to home!"

She went to bed, only to be roused at daylight by a peremptory call from Mrs. McGillicuddy, whom she found still in bed, her hair in curl-papers, her face a ghastly white, a large basin on the chair beside her bed.

"Cynthyan," said she, "I'm very sick. I've bin throwing up all night. Oh, you needn't pretend to be sorry, you thankless critter, 'cause I know you ain't! You will be before the day's over though, I'll warrant, for you'll have to do my work as well as your own. Now, go and fix the fire an' bring me a dose of 'pain-killer.'"

Cynthyan went and, not having sufficient knowledge to attribute Mrs. McGillicuddy's illness to the real cause, the lobster, felt with awe, that Providence had at length answered her prayer. The "pain-killer" rather increasing than decreasing the pain, Cynthyan wisely suggested the doctor.

"Him!" said Mrs. McGillicuddy, with scorn, "no, Cynthyan; I shall die—"

"When?" gasped Cynthyan, dropping into a chair.

"When my time comes and not before," stentoriously. "It might be now; it might be tomorrow, or it might be years off. Now, don't you set thar staring like a jack o'lantern, but get up and see if my laying out gownd ain't in the bottom drawer of the beaureau. Yes, that's it,—with the white satin ribbon run through it. Oh my! Oh, my!"

She lay back, white and spent, after the spasm had passed, and Cynthyan, believing her dead, opened her mouth and emitted a howl. Mrs. Mc Gillicuddy's eyes flew open, and—with a snap: "I ain't dead yet!" said she, "an' you needn't start hollering if I am, for I know *you* won't be sorry, Cynthyan *A-dams!* An' now go an' start on your work, an' don't forget it's fish for breakfast Sundays."

All morning, the weight of that guilty prayer hung like a lodestone around Cynthyan's neck, causing her to burn the dinner pork and drew down upon her devoted head a shrilly shrieked, pain-punctuated tirade from the hidden Mrs. McGillicuddy, who, as her boarders put it, "had a nose like a hound."

Having fed the boarders, washed the dishes, and fixed up the kitchen, Cynthyan went to spend the brief interval between then and supper with the sick woman.

"Draw down that shade a little, Cynthyan," faintly. Then, with a groan, "If this don't beat all, being sick on revival night—and that new silk dress I'd meant to overpass Mis' Boxom with, lying all wasted, in the drawer! Set down, Cynthyan, and don't dast to pop your eyes at me like that! I ain't a corpse yet am I?"

"No marm," stammered Cynthyan. She sat down, but found it impossible to keep her frightened eyes from Mrs. McGillicuddy's face. It looked so white and drawn and altogether strange that Cynthyan's heart contracted with fear. If Mrs. McGillicuddy died, would she, Cynthyan, be counted a murderer?

"Cynthyan," murmured Mrs. McGillicuddy, now on the verge of sleep.

"Marm?"

"There's a pair of white silk stockings—real silk—there too—an' Cynthyan—"

"Marm?"

"Don't let 'em take my teeth out, for *I* don't want to get up on the Last Day

looking like old Gramma Gunter."

She slumbered, and Cynthyan, sitting on the edge of her chair, agonized for a while, then sinking to her knees began to fervently pray thus: "Lord, I didn't ask you to make her sick as this, you know I didn't! I only wanted her to be a lil bit sick—a headache or p'raps the misery in her bones, so'st I wouldn't have to go an' testify; so, Lord, won't you make her better, please, for you know I ain't really mean enough to want her to be real sick or to die! Make her better, please!"

She rose with a lighter heart and went to prepare supper, feeling sure that just as her prayer of last night had been heeded, so would this one be, but when, having cooked for and waited on the boarders, she creakingly ascended the back stairs to peep at Mrs. McGillicuddy, she felt certain that she would see the roses of health blooming on that lady's usually buxom cheeks, but instead, she found her looking a little more shrunken and a little more yellow than before. Cynthyan now felt that Providence had utterly deserted her and left her wholly desolate. She groaned, and Mrs. McGillicuddy, stirring in her sleep, murmured faintly, "Thar's them lady-fingers I made yesterday, an' a half-dozen bottles o' last year's ginger wine—that'll do for—*afterwards*—"

Cynthyan sank into a chair, terrible visions of the hangman's rope rising before her eyes, awful repetitions of the curse of Cain thundering in her ears. Involuntarily she put her hand to her forehead, feeling sure she would find the brand burned there. Yes, she had murdered Mrs. McGillicuddy; murdered her just as surely as though she had stuck a knife through her heart, for had not she, Cynthyan, prayed that wicked prayer, Mrs. McGillicuddy, clad in the new black silk with jet buttons, that was to have "over-passed" Mis' Boxom's, would now have been sitting in the foremost pew, groaning out Hallelujahs and Amens.

"If you'd on'y let me take it back," she moaned. "Oh, if you on'y would—I'd go an' testify—"

That word brought her to her feet. Was it possible that by going and testifying now, at the eleventh hour, she might make reparation, and Mrs. McGillicuddy be permitted to recover? She didn't wait to put on a hat but, clad in the old lilac calico which had so long done her yeoman service, she ran out into the scented night; climbed the stile by the old stone wall, and took the field path to the church.

Never in all the visiting revivalist's circuit had he had a more successful night; never had the penitents been so many, the Amens, Hallelujahs, or "Praise the Lords" so loud. He stood, flushed, triumphant, and slowly and solemnly raising his hands, opened his mouth to give his final blessing. It remained open, but silent, for just at that exact moment Cynthyan burst in out of the night. She had run so fast that her hair, usually plastered to her head and wound into a tight "door-knob" behind, had become loosened, and formed a glorious frame for her white young face; her long-suffering calico waist had given way under the strain, showing the soft curves of her budding womanhood.

Both congregation and minister, might have been a second and third edition of Lot's wife so still, so frozen, were they. Only the young blacksmith in the corner by the harmonium seemed awake. He sat up straight and looked hard at Cynthyan. Why had he never noticed before what a real glory her hair was, how white her skin beneath the powdering of freckles, how snappy bright her eyes, how red her lips, how white the teeth that showed between? The mate-love stirring vaguely in his heart, flashed up into flame.

"I've come," gasped Cynthyan, "I've come to testify. I don't know how, but I've come, an' I'd better testify right here an' now that I prayed the Lord to make Mrs. McGillicuddy sick and that he did! He's made her so sick that I'm sure she's going to die an' me be a murderess, but I didn't mean for Him to make her as sick as that; I on'y mean for Him to make her a teeny lil bit sick so'st she couldn't come to church an' make me testify about my blessings. I didn't believe I had none, but I do now—I do now! For even if the shingles is poor and lets the rain in on my bed, spring and fall, even if my dress is too small an' pinches me cru'l under the arms, even if

my hat is a ten-year-old and heavy, even if my stocking is old, one foot being an odd one of Mrs. McGillicuddy's an' one leg Miss Parsons's which she gave me, having lost the other down the well a year come Thanksgiving, even if my shoes does pinch an' wrap the lil toe under the big one a bit, ain't they a roof, an' a bed an' a dress an' stockings, an' shoes just the same, an' blessings? I want to thank Mrs. McGillicuddy an' the Lord for 'em right now! I want to testify that I'm a wicked sinner right now! I want to testify that I'm willing to go to prison an' be hanged right now! I want to testify that I'm a miserable critter an' didn't oughter be allowed to live! I want to testify that even if I do get up at half after four most mornings an' five on Sundays, I love Mrs. McGillicuddy an' want her to live an' come to church next Sunday in her new black silk gownd that's to over-pass Mis' Boxom's."

She was gone, out into the night and, swift as a kingfisher after its mate, the young blacksmith was after her. For a second the silence held, then it shattered and babel broke looes. "Mis'" Boxom fainted and had to be carried to the vestry; the constable thought it his duty to straighway go and arrest the erring girl and was only dissuaded from it by Deacon Grey's tense assurance that "a long-looked for visitation from God could not, in any legal sense, be looked upon as a murder;" the grocer called her shameless, the butcher called her brave, and the congregation called her everything from saint to sinner and back again.

"It was a splendid thing to do," glowed the resident young minister, "a noble thing, and I'm going after her."

But he didn't go in.

"I wasn't needed," said he, quietly, to his young wife. "One of the boarders directed me to Mrs. McGillicuddy's room and I went up and looked in,—but I wasn't needed. Cynthyan was kneeling by the bed, confessing, and Mrs. McGillicuddy, almost recovered, was sitting up with quite a tender hand laid on that wonderful flame of hair, and there were,—yes, I looked twice to make sure of it,—actually tears on those redoubtable old cheeks, so I knew I wasn't needed there and came away."

"And Joe, the blacksmith?" cried his wife, who had been a very interested spectator to that hurried exit.

"Was getting in the wood and water for morning," with a twinkle. "You've never believed much in revivals or testimonies, have you, my dear? Yet see what's come of the testification of Cynthyan Adams!"

A master mariner wishes to engage his ship in a business which offers larger dividends than the trade of common carrier. But he realizes that $3.15, cash on hand, will hardly purchase the needed equipment. He therefore sets out to raise his capital to the necessary *nth* power and in doing so succeeds in breaking up a lodge meeting. Look for GETTING IT, *by Frederic R. Buckley* next month.

NINE POINTS OF THE LAW

BY ELWOOD BROWN

A title suggestion, "Thieves All," was written at the end of the manuscript of this story. The remarkable point, however, is not that there are several thieves in the story but that all are so proficient in preserving their "amateur standing."

AT seven P. M. Billy Cunningham entered the O. K. Garage and, quietly stepping to the row of stored automobiles, let his gaze travel up and down the line, searching for something in particular. The quest was not difficult, for though the row was long—a testimonial to the prosperous business of the up-to-the-minute institution—the little Red Rover was a bit conspicuous and Billy located its shiny bright front near the far end of the low-lying building.

"No, you don't!" spat out big Jim Burling as Billy started to climb into the diminutive car. A detaining arm blocked his further progress. "Nothin' like it—see?"

Billy squared his average-sized shoulders. "I guess she's mine, and I have the legal right," he shot back.

"Nothin' o' the sort," came the low rumble of Burling's heavy bass. "An' don't talk law to me. Ain't I set up nights learnin' the law an' the rights of garage 'prieters? I know all about these here leans, 'tachments an' garnishments. This car don't move out o' here until you come across with the repair bill. Get me, William?"

That William "got" the general purport of the exposition was patent. "Now see here, Jim," he coaxed, "I've never denied the bill, have I? Can't a man be legitimately hard up once in a while?"

"That talk's floated the boat for the last time. There ain't nothin' lawful in the way you're hard up. Now this night studyin' has hardened me an' from now on I claim all in sight. Run along."

"Well, I can't pay now, and I must have the machine," and a sudden closing of the jaws changed the whole line-up of Billy's features. And, following the remark, he again started to climb into the seat.

A big, grease-stained paw sank heavily upon his shoulders. "I exercise my right o' lean on this car," came the voice, weighed with import.

From infancy Billy Cunningham had inherently claimed his right of way. Forcible restraint was a stranger to him.

"Take your hand off me, Burling," he said incisively. "I've got business tonight. This is my car." And he endeavored to wriggle free of the garageman's grasp.

The grip on his shoulder tightened. "You get off that step before I pull you off. My bill's got prior right 'bove everythin' else. The code says: 'Bills for repair—'"

"Never mind the code. My business is urgent. This is my car and, by glory, no roughneck—"

Burling, suddenly remembering, released him. "I'm no roughneck, an' I ain't goin' to commit no 'sault an' battery. I know the law. You come under trespassin'. This here garage is my castle an' the little, red car is a temp'rary chattel." The words came forth with a relish. "Now you better move or I'll have a cop brought in."

"We'll see about this," spluttered Billy, impotently. "I'll give this matter to my attorney tomorrow."

"I don't need no 'torney," came back Burling. "You can't git her out without puttin' up bond, an' I know well enough you can't raise one. You're stuck if you do."

"What are you going to do with my car?" demanded Billy, changing his tactics.

"Sell it to myself for repairs an' storage, accordin' to law."

"That's once you read your law wrong. This is a case of forcible detainer, and I'll have you criminally prosecuted," threatened the erstwhile possessor of the Red Rover car.

"That detainer stuff don't go. I read that too. You're goin' along. Good night."

In the face of the trespassing-castle exposition, Billy knew further argument was useless and, in high dudgeon, he walked out of the O. K. garage, breathing maledictions on its proprietor.

The evening's lark contemplated,—business was farthest removed from Billy's intentions,—probably would be compulsorily curtailed. The joy-ride finish, planned for his own little racer, loomed as a vanished allurement for, after paying the evening's entertainment, Billy knew there could be no surplus for the hiring of a strange automobile.

Additional trouble, in the person of one Burney McWade, credit manager of the Red Rover Automobile Agency, lay in wait for Billy at his apartment. McWade, wholly soured by the depressing nature of his job and, at the present moment pessimistically vengeful, without even the grace of a perfunctory hand-clasp, announced: "I've come to take back our auto. Where is she?"

"*Our* auto?" retorted Billy sarcastically. "Since when?"

"The auto is still the property of the Red Rover Co.," replied McWade in the voice of one announcing a contemplated bankruptcy. "By the contract-lease terms we hold title until paid in full. You are badly in default of your payments and have not responded to our letters. I ask you to deliver the machine to me now," and the lemon-flavored voice carried the souring note of a hopeless melancholiac.

Billy scratched one ear contemplatively and with a sense of returning pleasure. Two difficulties may be no worse than one. Scylla had nothing on Charybdis and possibly if matched against each other, both might lose their venom.

"I do not know that I am prepared to surrender *my* car. Have you a court order?" interrogated the delinquent payer.

"It is not necessary."

"And if I tell you that my car is resting in a legal castle, impregnable and stormproof, what would you say?"

"We are wasting time," came the tone of an ultimatum. "Where is the car?"

"Fortunately, it's where neither you nor I can get it," returned Billy, now blissfully happy. "I doubt if even a bench warrant could remove it from its present legal entrenchment. That auto is in the possession of the Law, itself. You can't touch it."

"What are you driving at?"

"I don't care to tell you. McWade, you are a hell of a credit manager. I don't care to be guilty of ''sault an' battery,' so get out." Billy's words came forth in unctuous joyfulness.

"I'll not get out without our car."

"Your car, my car, or the other fellow's car, stays where it is. McWade, in addition to being a hell of a credit manager, you are also a trespasser. This very evening I learned the exact position of a trespasser. Get out, before I make you need all the accident insurance my company's got left."

McWade got out, and he got out wrathfully.

The affair had raised Billy's spirits again to normal, for he was now both evicted and evictor, and he dressed for the evening's pleasure with his usual lightheartedness. The legal status of the car's ownership was admittedly beyond his ken of knowledge.

The clink of glasses in a certain Bohemian Red-Ink Joint mingled with the hilarious laughter of early morning revelers and the raucous notes of the cabaret girls' alleged singing, and altogether suggested the general atmosphere of "the bars let down." But hardly "let down," only "lowered," for Billy belonged to that class that enjoys looking temptation in the face—and vanquishing it.

Billy's discourse with the girl at his side had ranged from insurance, which he had earnestly tried to sell her, to the influence of emotional singing on the nervous ganglia, of which he knew a shadowy little, to a very brief discourse on psychiatry and psycho-analysis, of which he knew still less, to carburetors, transmission, differen-

tials, and the whole subject of automobiles, in which line of useful knowledge he was ahead of the voluminous latest books.

Altogether, Billy had enjoyed himself, and, though he had learned precious little of the girl at his side, she had responded with an intelligent understanding and enthusiasm that added zest to the conversation. At length, as the two were preparing for their departure, the restaurant door of the Palace swung wide and in breezed Jim Burling, dressed as a garage proprietor has no license to dress. Billy took in the ample starched shirt, long, flowing, full dress with its abnormally lengthy swallow tails, bright red carnation, and the complete detailed splendor of adornment. And, dangling on Jim Burling's arm, lending further grace to the whole, was a petite, highly colored bit of feminity, as to gown and face, daintily tripping her way in and smiling the gaudy smile that foretold nothing of good for her cavalier. Plainly, it was to be seen that Jim Burling and his days profits were promised a separation.

Billy glanced out of the window and his heart bounded within him. In the moonlight, the little red racer, *his* red racer, by right of his long love for it, glistened invitingly in the moonlight. Billy's blood went hot in his veins. Whatever the garage man's right of lien, by the Great Carburetor, no right of joy-riding was appurtenant thereto! And Billy resolved on a hazardous course.

"We've certainly spent a delightful evening," the girl beside him was remarking. "Only one thing is missing. Do you know, I've dreamed joy-rides, and this evening, if only—"

"Are you game for an adventure," broke in Billy excitedly,—"a real one!" Billy had noted Burling swagger to a far corner of the room without his being seen as he, Billy, retreated behind the wine list.

"Depends upon the limitations—"

"Such as temporarily borrowing another man's car?"

"You mean stealing?"

"Not so harsh. I care for my reputation."

"But if you got caught?"

"We won't. It's as safe as a risky thing dare to be."

"Are you talking paradoxes or life insurance?' '

"Neither,—joy-riding."

"For one short hour then. Afterwards, straight to my home. Then you can take your chance of returning the car."

Soon they were out in the street, Billy hovering over his Red Rover and wondering if she were in good trim. Surely she must be, for Burling was in the automobile business.

"Here we are. Hop in," invited Billy.

From his pocket Billy pulled a switch key, the one that throws on the magneto and called by the Red Rover Co., "the magneto key." It was all of ownership Billy had been able to retain in the car and the legal Burling had not dared to trespass on his person to the extent of removal. Billy turned on the gas, slapped his foot on the self-starter, let go the clutch, and they were off.

"How were you able to start it?" asked the girl pointedly.

"I owned a Red Rover once, and I've kept a key. I thought some day I might want to do this very thing."

"Regular professional, aren't you?" she beamed, with an admiring look in her eyes. "How superlatively clever you are. Why don't you embark in the business? You sell insurance to people who are not able to keep up payments. One form of robbery is no worse than another."

Down the street they dashed at a merry clip, and a gladness, the sweetness of revenge, sang in Billy Cunningham's heart. Of speeding and the exhilaration of a sharp wind stinging his cheek, Billy never tired, and the warming presence of the vivacious young woman at his side added to the delight. And thoughts of the soon-to-be raging Burling, completed the large cup of ecstacy, of which Billy was drinking his fill.

Out on the suburban road during a quieting lull Billy gave fuller thought to his companion. He had known her but a short time; met her at a little gathering of the insurance clan, and had responded to her good looks and pleasing personality. He guaged her a strong-willed Salamander, of excellent control, and capable of alter-

nating between a surprising degree of reserve and a surprising freedom. He had enjoyed her little sallies and, even more, her artistic compliments on his driving skill. Her last one: "Your mathematical accuracy in giving the sand-pile just the wistful touch and farewell," thoroughly pleased him, and a touch of seriousness, for the moment, was interrupted by:

"I am getting cold. Really, quite chilled. Let's run back to the city and get something piping hot."

"A good toddy?" he invited.

"No. Boiling hot soup," she answered instantly. He felt his judgment of her correct.

They drove in, stopped at a restaurant some distance from the Palace and ordered a light repast. The girl, somewhat tired, with a dignified reserve listened to Billy's running small talk, dropping in an occasional comment as she sipped her soup in quiet enjoyment.

"You did wrong to borrow the auto, even from a friend," she remarked after an interval. "Wherein will he find anything humorous in scouring the city, only to have his wrath stifled when he runs upon your beaming face?"

"All in the lark—my lark," responded Billy, carefree and happy. "And now, if you are rested, shall we drive you home?"

They walked leisurely to the sidewalk, Billy's face wide spread in a grin as he mused further on the discomfiture of the burly garage proprietor.

The grin suddenly died. Billy looked forth into an empty gutter. The street was void; the car gone.

"The miserable hound!" exploded the insurance man.

"Tit for tat," she chuckled merrily.

"That's not the point," wailed Billy. "It really was my car!"

"Your car? That explains. I thought you were too green to be a live one." Her voice was lightly taunting.

"A live one! Of course I'm not a low down—"

"Amateur," she derided. "Take me home first and then go steal it back again. I'll bet you see the police station before the break of gray dawn."

Her musical laughter rallied Billy and he quickly regained his good humor and, for good or evil, resolved to follow her advice.

When Jim Burling, heavied with surplus food and drink, and lightened of intelligence and ready money, wended his wavering footsteps from the Palace, bearing on his more or less weakened right arm, the wavering bit of colored feminity, now blending a genuine carmine with the spurious in her cheeks, and found naught in the line of red automobiles, he let loose a cultured treatize on the law. "Stealin' is felony," he began to his companion. "No misdemeanor 'bout this. Grand Larceny, an' worse. Stealin' at night-time gets a bigger penalty than in daylight. An' I know who done it!" he suddenly burst out, his clearing senses bringing forth sudden wrath. "He'll get a jail sentence, too—"

"Free board, free lodgin'—" began the wastrel at his side. "Get me home, will you?"

"I'll put you on the street car an' goodnight to you. I'm goin' to get back my car an' 'rest the law-breakin' cur!"

The home going of the illuminated vagrant is an incident that in no way pertains to the vital elements of this story, but that there may be no ragged remnants to account for, it is necessary to state that the requisite carfare, and not one cent more, was advanced by the garage proprietor. J. Burling, henceforth, was bent on serious business.

Following the resolve to sell the car to himself for repairs and storage, Jim Burling had become firmly imbued, by repeated suggestion, with the idea that the act was as good as accomplished and the machine his by countenance of the law. It lent a powerful motive force to his actions.

And a measure of luck awaited the garage man, though not as expected. Reasoning that Billy Cunningham would probably take a spin into the country and then return to the city, Burling concluded that the insurance seller would possess sufficient sheer nerve to return to the very café from which he had stolen the machine and cele-

brate. It was very like Billy to do just that thing. So, with the Palace café as headquarters, Burling made short incursions in various directions, covering a radius of several blocks and noting each and every automobile. In the thinning traffic this was not difficult and Burling suddenly thrilled for, not a block away, he spied the little red racer, leisurely picking its way along and heading for that genial harbor, the friendly Palace of Red Ink.

The garage man scurried for the nearest policeman, and, by wizard luck, found one, fully awake and eager for business.

"Quick, officer! A stolen machine! Get the crook!" he shouted.

The policeman gave chase. He happened to be a lean one and of good digestion. The machine stopped on his demand, the driver indignant and demanding explanation.

Burling, coming from the rear, began his tirade while still some feet away. "You law breakin' pup," he boomed. "This means from two to ten years accordin' to the penal code. You robber, you, stealin' a car from under the very nose of a lady an' gentleman!"

He stopped suddenly and choked in his amazement. The man in the car was credit manager Burney McWade! And by his side was a woman. Evidently the couple were joy-ride bent.

"Who in hell are you?" blurted Burling.

"I do not know that I have the value of your acquaintance," returned McWade icily, "and what do you mean by this brawling interruption?"

Burling knew not the man, but he knew the car. To make doubly sure, he looked it over, noting evidences of his own repair work.

"I thought you were somebody else," he began more mildly, "but that don't give you no legal right to steal my car!"

"Steal your car! Officer, this man is crazy. Will you kindly get out of my way! You are detaining a lady! This car belongs to me, always has belonged to me, and is mine until I sell or trade it."

Slowly Burling came to. "No, you don't, slick one," he began. "The smooth crooks are the biggest ones. Officer, I am owner, in fee simple, of the O. K. Garage. Here's my recommend," and he handed an ornate card impressively to the policeman.

"And I am salesmanager of the Red Rover;—my card. Note this is a Red Rover machine."

"Officer," said the woman, plaintively, "this is very annoying and insulting to a lady."

"I'm sorry for you wimmin," remarked Burling, "when we men mix up with the law, but officer, I demand you arrest him, till we find out where we're at." Burling was doing plainer and harder thinking than night lesson work, for the present knotty problem concerned the subject of lease rights *versus* lien right, and Burling, in spite of his superior information, admitted he was in waters very deep, and no friendly bottom beneath.

But the garage man's brain work was soon interrupted while dealing with first premises and the little gathering in front of the Palace was further shocked by an unexpected climax.

Billy Cunningham, with a second officer trailing,—a fat one this time and very much shortened of wind,—bore down upon the gathering. "Arrest him for stealing my car!" blazed the insurance man, sighting the garage proprietor first.

Billy's second remark was strangled in its infancy as his subsequent gaze fell upon the prim visaged McWade, the last man in the world to be expected before the Palace at three A. M.

"Ah!" he beamed forth. "The stern man of credit! And now a king of joy riders! McWade, I didn't know *you* were a thief. Officer, both of these scoundrels are thieves. Arrest them both."

"What you doin' here, Jerry?" asked the lean cop of the fat one.

"Same as you," responded the second encouragingly.

Jim Burling, fighting for his own interests, struggled for the floor. "There's jobbin' done here, officer. These chaps have planted this whole thing. That car left my garage this evenin', with me in it. Go 'phone my place. "Look up the name yourself. Don't let either of them chaps get away."

Burney McWade, badly handicapped, and desiring no undue publicity, began in his most business-like tones: "Officers, this car was sold by me on lease payment to Mr. Cunningham here. He has not met his payments. Automatically we come into possession—"

"Automatic possession by thievery at three o'clock in the morning," shot forth Billy. "Not on your life. That's my car and my name's on it. Officer, let me show you—"

Burling's powerful voice broke through again: "Officer, I know the law. Whatever those other chaps say, I'll show the repairs I made all over that car. Here you," to the woman on the seat, "get off that a minute. I'm goin' to show these officers—"

The fat cop turned to the lean one. "Percy, what'll we do?"

"Run 'em all in, Jerry," returned the lean Percy. "All three of the gents is stealin' the car from every other gent. It's a nest of crooks. I don't like that McWade chap, anyway."

"Me neither," returned Jerry.

The three midnight adventurers began to hedge. Particularly did McWade trim his sails.

"Gentlemen," he argued, "this seems to be—ah—er—a bit complicated. Possibly we all think we have rights to this machine. Mr. Cunningham has his name on my car. I have in my pocket the same signature to a lease contract, which I will show you. I will admit I took the empty car from in front of the Imperial—solely because I believe it my right by automatic abrogation—"

"Anything but that word," broke in Billy.

Jim Burling, hoping to get the car back to his garage in preference to the Police Station, again fought his way in. "I got a proposition for you. I got some law books out at my garage. Supposin' we all go out an' look up our sides an' settle it between ourselves. What do you cops say?"

"Nothin' doin'. You fellers may be all right, but this whole thing may be a plant. Then, you see, we get credit for the number of arrests we make. We're havin' a contest now an' I'm way ahead and Jerry has agreed to allow me to pull in any joint stuff we get. You fellers and the boat all go in. Exceptin' this; Jerry can take the lady home."

Burney McWade sighed the sigh of intense relief.

The program was carried out, and about four A. M. the three owners, equity holders, parties with inherent or acquired rights, lined themselves up before the desk sergeant.

"Hello, Billy," greeted the sergeant, "what you mixed up in? Come in to sell me another policy?

"And you, Jim Burling, as I live!" he greeted again. "Got a second-hand Pearl at a knockdown?"

"And if it ain't McWade himself," he beamed still further. "This is what I call pot luck. Come in boys and we'll have a little game. The ante's off; only for fun, you know—"

"Serious business first," announced Billy. "I wonder if you couldn't act for the judge. We'll place our facts before you."

"Sure. Take my decision, no protest?"

And each litigant put forth his argument; Burling, in particular, releasing gems of legal acumen.

"I'd like to see this little red racer," announced the sergeant. "Maybe just the thing I want to buy. I'll get the flashlights and we'll look her over."

Two police officers and three widely variant business men sauntered out upon the sidewalk to take a look at a very interesting little red car. The moon, now party hidden by a rift of clouds, cast an uncertain light upon the scene, a light that, because of its changing shadows, was hardly better than no light at all. The grim walls of the police station bulked to one side and the dirty street flanked the other. All was quiet and still.

Two flashes blazed a light where the little red racer had been left, and then flared up and down the street.

Five startled "Ohs" filled the stillness of the night. For the third time the car was gone!

Blankly the disputants looked from one to another. The situation was too tense for speech. Finally, the garage-lawyer re-

marked, disconsolately and with feeling: "Our three equities must of jointly an' sev'rally gone to blazes."

Billy Cunningham, puzzling the loss, suddenly felt a deathly sickening within, as he groped toward the solution. He plunged his hand into an upper pocket, searching for his magneto key. The pocket was empty.

"She's the only professional thief in the lot," he muttered dejectedly. "We're all raw amateurs," and he told his miserable story.

Out on a well paved highway a neat little red racer was humming her way along on a real joy-ride at last. A young man and a young woman, husband and wife, experts in the wrong business, sat in blissful comfort, admiring the changing night.

"The easiest city we've struck," remarked the woman. "Sixteen jobs, every one a success and we crown our efforts by making our getaway from under the very nose of the Police Station,—the safest place for a crook in all the wide world. I only have one little regret," she concluded. "He was such a likable, spontaneous chap and really meant me no wrong. I hope he never owned the car."

THE MIXED QUARTETTE, *by Octavus Roy Cohen,* is a theatrical yarn which will be included among next month's stories. It is about two song and patter artists. One is for uplifting vaudeville; he thinks he is prostituting his talent unless he makes a young Grand Opera out of the act. The other insists that "nut stuff" is the thing that "goes over big." Matters are further complicated when they team up with two girls, bill the act as The Operatic Quartette and start shouting selections from Verdi at the poor, bewildered public.

THE TWO-MILE TWINS

BY GEORGE THOMAS ARMITAGE

Did you ever run the "two-mile" in a track meet and feel that you would have to be revived with a pulmotor after the race? If you ever did, you will appreciate this tale, in which a runner gets not only a second wind but a third, fourth, fifth and then some.

THE score is tied—last call for the two-mile!'

"The fellows nearly wilted. It was the last race, and the last chance—the strain was sickening."

Shorty was telling a gang of yapp-mouthed freshmen, gathered in the gym the night before "track," about the Moker twins and their famous two-mile race, run in almost prehistoric days. The fresh didn't know Shorty; they didn't even know his name. It was sufficient that he had been at the "U" in its infancy.

"At the last minute the unexpected had to happen," he continued. "Our crack hurdler, Dago Roben, spiked himself, and Pat Sheed twisted an ankle, just when he had cleared eleven feet, and the Aggies beat us by an inch. Possum Craig lost his form in the weights. He'd been throwing 'em up the Hill and letting 'em roll back to him in practice. The Farmers grabbed almost every field event; even beat old Punk Owley in the broad jump. We fought 'em all the way and sometimes we were ahead, but we couldn't get the lead we were counting on. The crowd stuck to a man. They cheered like maniacs when they felt more like weeping.

"Cam, our captain, had taken the mile in an awful drag and was carried off the field, limp as a dish rag. Old Faithful Pete plugged right in behind. That was eight points for us. The bunch in the bleachers went nuts. Then Dago grabbed the low hurdles and Jimmie copped the 220 dash. The crowd went to pieces. Luck was breaking our way again when Stoddy made his terrible announcement that the score was tied.

"The Aggies were betting three to one on their man Morgan to take the two-mile. Who wouldn't bet on him? He'd won it three years in a row. If he won again it would be five points for the Aggies against our four, if Cam and Moker finished second and third. We'd lose by a point, even if Moker finished; but no one counted on him. He was only a puny little runt who'd always been nothing but a social butterfly like his twin brother. His training for track was a joke, but they didn't know what he had up his sleeve, and he wasn't telling. Cam had been training for four years to beat Morgan and this was his last chance. Both were Seniors.

"'One man left to win the championship,' yelled the cheer-leader. 'Altogether now, nine rahs for Cam!'

"If there was anyone in town who didn't hear the splitting yell that shook the sagging grandstands that day he was in the graveyard. The biggest crowd ever was there and everyone screeched. Moker in the dressing room, his twin over behind the signboard, heard that awful yell and trembled in their spikes. The Granges listened and smiled. But poor old Cam, he never heard a single whimper. The announcer hurriedly scanned a note from the gym. Then he lifted the big horn.

"'Cam is unconscious—can't run the two-mile.'

"There was a deathly silence; then a great moan. Stoddy might as well have said that Prexy had been killed or dancing abolished in the University. The Aggie bunch did a snake dance. Their band played the 'Conquering Hero' stuff that it had blared when their special train pulled into town that morning, two hundred strong. We wouldn't have cared so much about the meet, if it hadn't been the decid-

ing event. The Farmers had won the basketball pennant in the spring and we were football 'champs' the fall before.

"It was pretty tough to have the championship snatched away without a parting fight. No one thought of Moker. They just sat still and waited for his slaughter. Some went home. What was the use of staying? The meet was lost!

"The boys had to carry Moker to the starting post. He trembled like a stuck pig when they pulled off his blanket. He'd never stood before such a tremendous crowd. And imagine how you'd feel if the championship was tied up in those eight laps and you knew the crowd was sneering at you. But the air braced him a bit and the crowd gave him a cheer, more of sympathy. What could he do against that terrible Morgan who ran like a machine? But they admitted he had lots of sand to try.

"After the cheer, Moker's ribs expanded some. The runners stood at the starting line. Moker's legs looked like toothpicks beside Morgan's. The little shaver couldn't even cast a good shadow.

"Bang!' The starter's gun popped. They took the turn. Moker the second, got busy on the other side. Behind the big advertising signboard which they had induced Kelly, the down-town merchant for college boys, to put up to get the track week business, he was hidden from the crowd. He pulled off his clothes; no one could see him. Underneath was a track suit the same as his brother's. The Mokers were always being confused around the campus, but if their own mother could have seen them then she would not have known them apart.

"Morgan's style was to take a firm stride and never change; he wouldn't look back. The Mokers counted on that, for it gave them their best chance. The starting Moker kept right behind Morgan. At the signboard he slowed a trifle. Morgan dashed past. He didn't see the big robe behind the sign. For an instant the first Moker dropped out of sight. The other popped out like a jackrabbit and the race was on for sure!

"Moker's head was high; his hair flying. He carried a confident look. When he passed the grandstand for the first lap, he got the ovation of his life. The crowd stood to a man and screamed. They didn't know on the sidelines that he hadn't started. They were surprised that he had stuck even one lap at such a killing pace. They were proud of him but, of course, they never dreamed he would keep it up.

"'He can't keep that pace,' everyone predicted, 'but he's sure got guts.'

"The Mokers changed behind Morgan and back of the signboard every lap. While one was doing a quarter-mile sprint, the other was getting his second wind. Of course they had to be quick. One slip would see their finish; but they had been planning for weeks and practicing by moonlight. They dashed in and out like a clock, just as if it were the prescribed method of scholastic competition. If their own bunch had known, it wouldn't have been so hard, but the Mokers had to fool everybody and win the race, too. With a rest after each lap, they managed to keep up with Morgan and sure did fine for rotten runners. They were stepping on Morgan's heels half the time.

"The crowd's sympathy and respect changed to a last wild hope. Surely that little sawed-off couldn't win the championship! But there he was, right before their very eyes, tearing past periodically. They expected to see him croak any minute, but he didn't. Each time round the applause was greater. The roar in the stands became deafening. Morgan was worried. He couldn't understand how that puny little runt could stick so close; plainly he was fussed. He quit his old form. He sprinted and Moker did, too. He'd slow down, so would the man behind. The Mokers surely had his goat. But he wouldn't look back and Moker stayed behind.

"The gun cracked for the finish. It was the last lap! The students went straight up. The rooters were one terrific scream. It seemed as though they would tear the cords right out of their throats. They were wild—nutty—crazy. And there was that little runt of a Moker pegging his pipestem legs right behind Morgan's, and he didn't look as if he had run at all

Morgan was wobbling; his eyes were red; little beads of foam came through his set teeth; his face had that set look of a beaten man; he tried to sprint, but his feet were too heavy. The big Farmer staggered like he'd been kicked and Moker trotted easily. Why didn't he take the lead? The crowd didn't savvey that that would be impossible until the signboard was passed for the last time. There was no more music from the Aggie band; the players were too scared even to holler.

"'If old Moke can only hold out,' everyone was praying. They kept yelling 'Hang on, kid, hang on;—don't quit now,—only one more lap,—at a boy, take your time,—you've got him.'

"Girls got white; coeds gasped; profs' fists clenched. Tears ran down Prexy's cheeks; our old Dean was too weak to wave his hat. The thrill that went through that loyal crowd will never be duplicated on the old Varsity field. And still Moker was flying along, but still behind. Men threw their hats away; dashed from their seats; jumped the fence; tried to run the race themselves; cops pushed, but it was no use. The climax was too great,—and to be decided in an instant. If Moker won, the U'd have the championship cinched by two points. The runners were half around. Morgan stumbled; Moker slowed down; the Aggie recovered.

"'Take the lead, Moke, oh Lord, why doesn't he lead out?' was the cry from the crowd.

"The pair were nearing the signboard; they flashed behind. Morgan was tumbling again; Moker was passing him; the race was ours! We had won! We were the champions!—then—oh Lord—I can never forget,—it was terrible."

"For the love of Pete, what happened?" demanded his breathless audience.

Shorty stood up to knock the ashes from his pipe.

"Oh, nothing much. One Moker said it was a mistake; the other declared his brother was jealous. When the Moker on the last lap got to the signboard he ran right past. The world will never know why he did it.

"The hidden Moker was expecting his brother to stop as usual so he dashed into the race, fresh for a whirlwind finish.

"And there they came—the whole three, tearing down the last straightaway! The Moker twins were in the lead, struggling for first place. Morgan puffed way behind, an easy third.

"The students thought they were seeing double. The crowd gasped; their eyes stuck out a foot; they rubbed them and looked again. Judges hurried to the finish tape. No, sure enough, there were two Mokers. One was crowding the other for the pole; but there was only one Morgan.

"It was kind of funny and some laughed. But with most of the hoarse rooters, it was no joke. They saw the secret of the whole race. There wasn't a cheer as the Mokers came tearing down the stretch, fighting each other like mad for first. The Aggie rooters crowded to the fence with blood in their eyes. The Mokers broke the tape together. It was a dead heat. The sprinters were all in even though they had split the race. In silence they were carried from the track. One panted in the gym:

"'Did we win?'

"And the other answered happily, 'We sure did!'

"Even then they didn't realize what they'd done."

Shorty poked around in the dark for a cap by his chair.

"I'm going out for a little walk. It always makes me dizzy when I remember that finish."

The freshmen looked curious.

One asked, "Did we win the meet?"

On his way to the door Shorty turned back to drawl, "I should say not. The stunt was so rotten that even our coach couldn't stick up for the Mokers. Morgan got first, second and third—all nine points—as a special distinction for running against a relay team. And he earned 'em, too."

The story-teller was closing the door when another fresh piped out, "How did you get all the dope if it was such a secret?"

As the door closed, an answer came floating back, more like a sob than a laugh:

"I was one of the Mokers!"

THE BURNING RIVET

BY WILLARD BRADLEY

The girl's life was a seven-reel nightmare; her home was a $4.78 fare from Broadway; she had no money. She could only go out and let a little spring sunshine seep through her veins, with a big risk in doing even that.

CHINATOWN slept in the somnolence of spring. Here and there one caught glimpses of an almond-eyed brother squatted on the doorstep of his domicile, stealing a few precious minutes away from a sudsy washboard or white-hot stove to enjoy his afternoon pipe in supreme gratification. The pungent smell of steaming chop suey wafted on the faint breeze, and met one's olfactory nerves with a pleasant sting; and opposite the Twenty-Four Hour Mission, Tom Sing's be-whiskered Maltese basked in a shaft of warm sunlight, a welcome intruder in a glum, gloomy alleyway.

All was still, save for the periodic rumblings of a passing "L" train and the din from the hydraulic drills which were used in constructing a skeleton-like shaped viaduct, high over Chatham Square. Up there, a tan-faced, fennec-eared son of Erin sang ditties of his native land in a rich, tenor voice, as he toasted rivets over an acetylene flame and then tossed them with a rasping whoop down a long, chute-like strip of tin to an olive-skinned Sicilian, forty feet down. Occasionally, one would miss its mark and fall, a miniature pink meteor, into the blackened gutter of the Bowery below.

In Mulberry Bend, a veritable army of birds, fresh from the Blue Ridge, twittered in the trees; and on a fence hard by was stretched a 24-sheet litho, done in all the colors of the rainbow, that announced the coming to town of "The Greatest Show on Earth." Around the corner, in Mott Street, a dozen Italian pygmies were strenuously engaged in a vest-pocket edition of that all-absorbing pastime called the National Game. Horsehide struck wagon-tongue and windows were smashed, and right under the very eyes of peg-post Officer Moynihan at that! For Moynihan, at that particular moment, was concentrating his efforts in endeavoring to "make a date" for the following night with a certain little Messina miss, who had smiled at him thrice during the past forty minutes from her harem three stories above the street.

Surely, it was spring!

Annie Ragan knew it. She could feel it in her very bones, doped and drink-sodden as they were. She wanted to go out—anywhere, and drink in the invigorating air. But there was Mock Lee!

Mock was Annie's yellow husband. Ever since that storm-driven night six years ago, when Mock had resurrected her from the streets and made her his wife, his word had been law. She had never disobeyed him She dared not.

One of Mock's most stringent commands was that she should never go out unless he accompanied her. He was asleep now on a battered, bug-ridden cot by the open window. He had taken a few more whiffs of hop than were good for him, and at the earliest, could not awake before nightfall.

She wanted to go out. The poetry in her rotten soul, vague as it was, was rising to the surface. Spring was calling her! The pipes of Pan had struck a clarion note in her scavenger breast, and were enticing her, urging her on!

Mock, bulk of raw meat that he was with his bloated face and sparse, mouse-colored hair, slept steadily. The noise from the drills directly above the window did not annoy him in the least. In the parlance of the Ghetto, he was "dead to the world."

Annie, frail, unfortunate creature, sat

watching him, munching a bit of rice cake. Spring was calling her. *She wanted to go out.* But she was afraid of Mock. If he awoke during her absence there would be hell to pay. He would wait and wait until she returned, and just as sure as they burned incense in the Joss House around the corner, he would kill her! Annie knew it. Scores of scars that marked her miserable body had been inflicted by Mock for less serious causes than that. She shuddered.

Tears welled from the dissipation-betraying things she called eyes. She was a coward, a scurvy, cringing coward—afraid of a yellow, bulking bully she called husband! Her tousled head fell to the warped hardwood table with a nauseating thud and she sobbed as a child after having a leathern cat-o'-nine-tails applied to its spine by an over-exacting parent. She was a coward!

Spring was calling her! A train of pixies, carrying a daisy chain, seemed to enter through the sun-flooded window; pranced dapperly about the gloomy room, and then danced out again. From afar they seemed to beckon her. *Spring was calling her!*

Annie tossed the uneaten bit of rice cake bitterly to the uncarpeted floor, and grabbed a ragged shawl from a worm-eaten rack above her head. Wrapping it about her semi-bent shoulders, she cast a hurried look at the sleeping bulk—a look of supreme abhorrence—then darted out of the bleak, ill-smelling hole she called "home," for a few hours of freedom! As she moved, she endeavored to gather her thoughts, the wild, flighty thoughts of a hop-fiend and a drunkard. She wondered and pondered as to what she should do next, like a friendless convict after his release from a long prison term. She had it,—she would go to Mulberry Bend Park and watch the Italian kiddies at their play, and drink in the wine-sap air.

As she ran down the rickety steps leading to the street, darkened by the blanketing shadow of the "L" structure overhead, a train passing by loomed, to her half-crazed mind, like a gigantic buzzard swooping down upon her. Then the thought that Mock might awake while she was out, entered her mind and chilled her spine;—but only for an instant.

She had now reached the open street, and was inhaling deep draughts of the intoxicating, exhilarating April air. She darted down the dreary thoroughfare that is celebrated in both song and story, and turned into sun-washed Doyer Street.

Just as she rounded the corner, she ran into the very counterpart of Mock, a veritable facsimile of the man she loathed. She trembled, poor degenerate that she was, but breathed a sigh of relief when, upon looking back over her shoulder to see if the Celestial were following her, she discovered he was nowhere in sight. Mock's double had disappeared as if the ground had opened up and swallowed him. "All chinks and coons look alike, anyway!" she consoled herself, and continued on her happy, romping way.

The yellow, piercing sunlight, the first she had seen in the open for weeks, shone full in her face as she moved and made her blink. Until she became accustomed to it, she shaded her eyes with her hand, and groped semi-staggeringly along that fantastic, mottled way. Nearing the outskirts of the Italian Quarter, she began to hum some old, half-forgotten tune. Unmusical though it was, it depicted the buoyancy of her spirit at that particular moment, and she surprised more than one matter-of-fact pigtail that she passed.

Her heart leaped for joy as she neared her destination. Mulberry Bend Park was filled with children—and the ring of their happy, care-free voices. High in the air, in the centre of the generous tract, Old Glory, attached to a white-washed pole, shone in all its glad resplendence, as it fluttered in the soft, balmy breeze. The fires of spring burned in Annie Ragan's derelict soul; and for the first time in years, she felt almost happy.

She selected a seat on a bench which was enjoying the splendor of a recently applied coat of green paint and began to drink in everything about her. Next to her sat an old Florentine with the gout, and next to him, a little Madonna of the slums hugged and squeezed and pinched her first born.

Directly opposite her, in the middle of the roadway, a little knot of kiddies were playing ring-a-round-a-rosey. Suddenly, like an arrow shot from a taut bow, a large touring car came steaming along, headed direct for the circle of children. As the auto neared them, Annie's heart fluttered and she shrieked wildly to the tots to move. At her command, they scattered like geese in a country road, and she was glad. The maternal, mothering instinct that had been stifled long ago, was resurrected and reasserted itself!

Annie turned and gazed at the pink ball in the little Madonna's arms. She yearned to pinch its little feet, but she was afraid that her action would be resented; for Annie was of a supersensitive nature. Just now she did not have the appearance of a gentlewoman, so she refrained from touching the babe. However, she took pleasure in watching it as it squirmed about in its mother's arms. Soon she fell to dreaming of things that might have been.

In Chinatown all was still, save for the periodic rumblings of a passing "L" train and the din from hydraulic drills which were used in constructing a skeleton-like shaped viaduct, high over Chatham Square. Up there, a tan-faced, fennec-eared son of Erin sang ditties of his native land in a rich tenor voice, as he toasted rivets over an acetylene flame, and then tossed them with a rasping whoop down a long, chute-like strip of tin to an olive-skinned Sicilian, forty feet below. Occasionally, one would miss its mark—

Annie fell to dreaming about *things that might have been*.

Her thoughts wandered back a decade before, and in her mind's eye she viewed the things that had happened then, just as if she were watching them enacted before her on a moving picture screen.

In a little tank town in the western part of New York state, she had lived alone with her daddy, who was a recluse. After supper, it was customary for her to walk down to the village, a distance of about two miles, to the little post-office for the evening mail. On the evening in question, she tendered her box number and was told there was nothing for her.

On the way out, she paused for a moment to glance over the stock of illustrated postcards displayed on a rack near the door. She happened upon one that struck her as being quite funny, and she left the post-office in an extremely happy frame of mind.

A yellow touring car of foreign manufacture lay by the curb, snorting and belching steam like some giant monster of the Stone Age at bay. Not being in any particular hurry to commence her two-mile jaunt over the hill, Annie stood and gaped at the deserted auto. Being fifteen, Annie was privileged to do as she pleased.

She was taken more with its blatant blend than with the car itself. Besides, motor cars were quite a rarity in that part of the country at the time; so Annie—Annie, the unsophisticated and uninitiated—looked upon one very much as she would upon the bearded lady at the circus.

Presently, the monster's owner returned. He was a dapper, good-looking chappie, and his clothes and smile bespoke the prosperity he was evidently enjoying. Besides, the *Flor de Rina* he sported in his mouth was held together with a red-and-gold band. Taking him all in all, he looked much like the gentleman heroes she had read about in the family story papers.

Espying the innocent eyeing his "baby," the dapper gentleman asked Annie if she would like to take a ride in "it." Annie said, simply, that she would. And so it happened.

Four years later found Annie, friendless and alone, wandering about the maze-like streets of the metropolis during the throes of a midsummer storm. A hereditary fear of lightning had driven her into an inviting doorway off Astor Place—and it was there that Mock had found her.

Mock! The very name mocked her. When that saffron-hued mongrel took her in, she was contemplating a jump in the East River or a swallow of something that did not taste too bitter, but she had lacked the courage. Rather than face such a fearful fate, she had consented to become the wife of something she placed on an equal footing with a snake. Mock had been lenient, considering all things. He had introduced her to the supreme pacifier,

Hop, which Annie resorted to every time her conscience stung her, and that was often.

Suddenly, the old Florentine with the gout became uneasy and began to move restlessly about in the cramped space the municipality allots to one person. Annie looked at him. He reminded her of her father, who, she thought, was alone and uncared for, up there in the wilderness. Soon she became conscious that her eyes were wet. She dried them on her tattered sleeve, then, so as not to attract the inquisitive glare of the other occupants of the bench, she stifled the sob that swelled from her heart. A whiff of hop would have helped her now!

"Poor old daddy!" she thought. For the past five Thanksgivings, he had inserted a four-line "Personal" in one of the Park Row yellows, beseeching her to come home. She would have returned and braved the wagging tongues of the scores of Mrs. Grundys that abound in a town that boasts a population of only eight hundred—were it not for Mock. *And the fare was only four seventy-eight!*

The disc, that two hours before had been the color of molten yellow, was now a circle of blood-red cardinal. Slowly, it sank into its gigantic groove beyond the horizon; and then could be seen no more. With the advent of nightfall, the fresh-air fiends had left the park, and Annie was alone.

The clock a-top the New York Life Building struck six, and Annie wondered what Mock was doing. Perhaps he was still asleep. If he were, it was possible for her to return without his being the wiser regarding her brief vacation. But suppose he had awakened during her absence? She trembled like a condemned procurer awaiting the assassin's ax. Her heart sank and grew frigid.

Her musings were interrupted by the clanging of the bells and the shilling of the sirens on a dozen fire engines. They rolled madly toward Chinatown. The sky for miles around had become tinged with a pinkish glow and flared with the united force of a dozen sunsets, blotting out the stars. The sight enthralled her. Fascinated, she left the park and followed the flame, like a desert-thirsty man pursuing a mirage. As she moved, her shawl fluttered in the wind; her heart fluttered also.

Presently she arrived at Doyer Street and the Bowery. Here, pandemonium reigned. The engines chugged and spat burning cinders out of their bottle-shaped funnels, and the fire chiefs shouted commands to their nervy underlings. A fire line had formed and a big burly in blue and brass warded Annie back. She crossed the gutter, drenched with water sprayed from a score of nozzles, and then took her place amidst a labyrinth of craned necks.

She was swept off her feet by a veritable paroxysm of joy, and jumped up and down, clapping her hands, very much like a little lady of six after receiving her first lollypop. The very house she had emerged from earlier in the afternoon was in flames, and Mock, the yellow rodent she feared, was being roasted alive! The spell was broken!

A broken-nosed gent standing next to her nudged a cauliflower-eared friend of his. Indicating Annie, he spoke a solitary word: "Nuts!" Annie heard him, but gave no heed. What cared she what they branded her now? She was free, *free*, FREE!

Over the heads of the curious, she caught a glimpse of three bronzed balls glittering red upon catching the reflection of the tongues of flame that licked out of the burning shack directly opposite. She pondered for a second, and then exclaimed, aloud, "I have it!" The embryo alienist with the broken nose overheard, and was at once convinced of the veracity of his statement of the moment before. He repeated the words to his scavenger companion and thought, with the wisdom of his kind, that he understood. The other winked; he, too, thought that he understood.

Annie pushed through the mob and entered a door beneath the three balls. Inside, she removed the gold circlet that Mock had tendered on the night of their wedding, and all but flung it to the wizened Jew behind the counter. Ikey picked it up, shut one eye and examined the ring carefully.

"How much you vant?" he asked.

"*Four seventy-eight!*" said Annie. "And never mind the ticket!"

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

BY ROBERT McBLAIR

Our old friend, the Southern colonel, puritanical as is his sense of justice, is happily blessed with a social impulse governed by a code which is fully as rigid. Witness the case of this colonel who for thirty years, on the first of each month, takes oath to avenge the death of his mother.

"CICERO!" yelled the colonel. It was shortly after dinner, and he was seated in the willow chair beneath the big magnolia, fanning his pink face with his panama between drafts on a black cigar.

No answer coming from the white house across the lawn, the colonel emitted another summons, this time peremptory and like a tremendous bark.

"*Cic*-ero!'

At this, the screen door on the verandah shut with a bang and Cicero, bent double with haste and the demands of his burden, shuffled rapidly across the lawn, balancing before him a tall, amber-and-ice filled, mint-crowned, frosted glass on a little silver tray.

"Had to go plum' to de ice house for dis here ice, Marse Henry," he apologized breathlessly, while he removed a magnolia leaf from the pine board table and deposited his precious burden. "Seem lak whenever yo' in a hurry sun on gotta git up on its hine laigs an' bus loose. Hadn't no sooner—"

"Cicero!" interrupted the colonel. There was no mistaking the reminiscence of uniformed authority in the colonel's tone and in his eye. Cicero drew his expansive feet together, his skinny old body into a comparatively perpendicular attitude and stood at attention and saluted.

"Cicero," the colonel repeated in stern accusation; "have you forgotten again to remember what day this is? Must I take this important matter out of your hands after all these years and turn it over to that yellow nigger, Augustus?"

Cicero trembled in agitation. Death would have been sweet compared to this suggested disgrace.

"Fo' de *Lawd*, Marse Henry, I ain't done forgot it! I jes' didn't want to keep yo' waitin' fo' dat julep, dat's all, Marse Henry. Hit's a-waitin' on me right up dere in de hall." And Cicero, breaking abruptly from his military pose, started on a galvanic gallop for the house.

The hectic flush of displeasure giving way to the formal frown of authority, the colonel leaned back, crossed his white linen knees and slippered feet, and sipped his julep.

His eyes slowly brightened under the spell of memory as he sipped, and by the time that Cicero reappeared, bearing carefully and horizontally a long, heavy, ancient "horse" pistol, and under his arm a short ramrod and cleaning rag, the colonel's feelings were quite up to the pitch appropriate to this hallowed monthly ceremony.

"Cicero," demanded the colonel, the fire of a warrior lighting in his mild blue eye, "why do you bring me this weapon?"

Cicero's brow puckered until his scanty white wool almost met his eyebrows; painfully aware of the occasion's high demands, he answered with the gravity of an oracle:

"Dis here am de fust ob de month, Cunnel."

"And why do you bring me this weapon on the first of the month, Cicero?" thundered the colonel, as if talking before an unseen audience of hundreds.

"So's yo' kin load her up good an' fresh, Cunnel. An' so's yo' kin shoot her once to see if yore han' is stiddy."

"And why should my hand be steady, Cicero?"

"So's yo' kin shoot dat Yankee gemman."

"Yes, that damned Yankee, Cicero."

"Yas suh! Dat damn Yankee officer gemman, what burned yo' Pa's house down when yo' Ma was sick an' lef' her out'n de lawn on a cot where she done kotch her def."

"Correct," confirmed the colonel gruffly, pulling on his white moustache. "Now, who is this damned Yankee?"

"We don' know, Cunnel."

"Then why this monthly performance, Cicero?"

"'Cause we wanner be riddy ef we ever fine him, Cunnel. An' so we won't furgit."

"And—" prompted the colonel.

"An'—an'—" echoed his stumbling retainer.

"The oath, Cicero."

"Yas suh! An' we done swo' it, Cunnel."

"What did we swear, Cicero?"

"We swo'—we swo'—"

"—By the body and blood,"

"Body and blood," repeated the old darkey.

"Of those who have fallen in the great lost cause."

"Los' cause," said Cicero.

"By their spirit and their hopes and their memory—"

"Mem'ry," repeated Cicero.

"To eliminate such a cur."

"Limonascious cur," Cicero echoed.

"Whenever we may find him."

"Find him," Cicero finished.

"Have you got the new cartridge?"

"Yas suh."

The colonel took the pistol.

"Which knot is it, Cicero; the first or the second?"

"Dat one near de lil' holler in de lim', Marse Henry. De middle one."

"Very well."

The colonel aimed for a moment, then pulled the trigger. A thunderous sound entered the air, together with a cloud of smoke; the old horse pistol kicked high and hard; but right in the center of the dark middle knot in the limb a fleck of white wood showed where the bullet had gone true.

Cicero chuckled.

"Smack plum' 'tween de eyes, Marse Henry! Every month it's de same way."

"Best shot in my regiment, Cicero;" the colonel began the same remark he had made every month for thirty years; "and I'm not too old yet to fight for my state if she needs me,—nor to revenge a dastardly crime. Clean her out well, Cicero, put in the fresh cartridge, and hang her up in the hall again."

Some three weeks later the colonel was again seated beneath the big magnolia, occasionally sipping with appreciation at one of Cicero's juleps. It was late in June. The sun lay yellow and warm on the rich green grass, but a soft, cool zephyr stole in and out between the stately trees and stirred wisps of hair on the colonel's white head. High up in a nearby elm a cicada sang; a red bird pecked at the leaves near the road fence; and on the colonel's gold-headed cane a pale green measuring worm alternately made a loop of its back and waved itself about in the air.

The quiet, and an excellent dinner accompanied by some equally excellent port, finally made themselves felt; the colonel's head swayed slowly, and found a haven on his chest; a sound that somewhat rivaled the cicada troubled the afternoon solitude.

Cicero shambled across the lawn and touched the colonel on the arm.

"A gemman to see yo', Marse Henry."

"A gentleman to see me? What does he want?"

"Dunno, Marse Henry. He ast ef yo' was home an' guv me dis here kyard."

"'Captain Sherwood Horace,'" read the colonel, yawning; "'U. S. Army—retired.' What the devil!"

"Heerd him say sumpn bout some timber, Marse Henry. He's a Yankee gemman all right. Says, 'Thank *you*.'" Here Cicero squeaked out a rising inflection on the 'you.'

"Timber? Oh yes; he's from Horace and Archer, of Boston. Ask the gentleman out here, Cicero, and bring out another glass and some ice."

Shortly the stranger, a tall, elderly man of military bearing, with a close-cropped, grizzled moustache and fine dark eyes, came across the lawn, walking with a slight limp.

"Captain Horace," said the colonel, "I bid you welcome to the South. The war

is over now these thirty years, and I consider it a pleasure, suh, to meet with an officer in the opposin' army. I hope you will be my guest while you are here."

"Why, I thank you very much indeed for your invitation, Colonel, but I expect to take the morning train back North, and I have left my bags at the inn."

"I refuse to consider the idea for a second, suh," said the colonel, with immediate heat, "that you should come to my village, suh, and have to put up at an inn. I insist, suh, that you consider yourself from this moment as my guest."

"With pleasure," agreed Captain Horace, dismissing the matter with a smile and a wave of the hand, and accepting a chair. "Now about that timber, Colonel. I see that you have been making some calculations there. Perhaps you have arrived at a figure that we may discuss."

"No suh. Those calculations refer to port wine, Captain. I have a bottle in the cellar known as number eight—old number eight. It has been in my possession for forty years, suh. But two years from tomorrow it will be eighty years old, and that day I shall open it, suh, in celebration of my sixty-fifty birthday. I have been figurin', suh, the number of minutes that must elapse before I can open that bottle. You see that they reach the tremendous total of one million, thirty-two thousand, six hundred and forty. It is not well, suh, to let the mind dwell upon such matters."

"No," smiled Captain Horace, "I imagine not. In our busy North we have not so much time to spare; but down here there is such a peace and sweetness that one might well be content to sit and wait for expected blessings."

"It is not so beautiful as it might have been," sighed the colonel. "That 'March to the Sea' did not help things any. There were some terrible things done on that march, Captain."

"No more than were demanded by military necessity," replied the captain with spirit, putting down his glass. "There are hoodlums in every army, Colonel, as you know; but everything that the officers did on that march was done under orders and for military reasons."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders as if to say that he did not agree, but saw that discussion was useless, and pushed the box of cigars across to the captain. There was a silence as the two men lighted up.

"There were certainly many regrettable incidents," agreed the captain reminiscently. "In fact, the whole campaign was regrettable,—but it was necessary. I was with Sherman on that ride, Colonel. My company passed through this very section. As I came along the road just now I saw a place that I burned down. A red schoolhouse has gone up in its stead, but I recognized an old broken willow and the stone top of a cistern in the yard. I remember that there was a lady ill in the house and we had to carry her out; it made my heart sick at the time; but—I give it to you as an instance, Colonel—what else, under our orders, could we have done?"

The colonel went pale. Suddenly he doubted if he were awake. Could it be real—this sufficient, distinguished man looking off thoughtfully across the lawn and letting fall these terrible words with such uncanny calmness? Little strips of thoughts fluttered by the colonel's eyes: glimpses of red flames licking out of familiar windows, of a pale, sweet, death-haunted face watching a tragedy too deep for tears; he saw a stone cross in the churchyard, and a star that shone brightly on lonely nights. Cicero, flying toward the house at something between a shamble and a gallop, was a figure in a dream.

The colonel leaned forward and gripped the table. "Did you realize, Captain Horace," he asked, in a voice that came to his ears as from far away, "that your treatment of this lady might be tantamount to murder?" His expression took on a grimness strangely out of place on his comfortably genial countenance.

"I gave you that as an example, Colonel. I, of course, could not know what might be the result upon the lady's already delicate health. But what else was to be done? We had information that papers were concealed in the house. We could not find them. So the house had to be burned. You are a soldier; you know that orders must

be obeyed; you know that the soldier is under the heel of necessity, and therefore knows no law."

"There can be no necessity for the murder of an innocent invalid woman." Out of the tail of his eye, the colonel saw Cicero now near at hand. "Did it occur to you, Captain Horace, that this lady was some man's wife, was another man's mother?"

Captain Horace looked up at the colonel curiously. "I could have regretted the occasion no more, my dear Colonel, if the lady had been my own mother. But I was a soldier, Colonel, and I did my duty."

"Captain Horace," said the colonel, rising and taking the pistol from Cicero's hand, "that lady was my mother!"

The announcement lost nothing of dramatic effect in the manner of its delivery. The unseen audience that the colonel seemed often to act before might almost have been heard to applaud.

Captain Horace jumped to his feet, upsetting his glass and overturning his chair.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried.

"It means, suh," replied the colonel, "that retribution is overtakin' the sinner. Thirty years ago I swore to avenge this wanton crime against humanity and my house. Now the day of reckonin' has come."

"This is murder!" cried the captain,—"cold-blooded murder! Give me a gun and fight me like a man."

"An eye for an eye, suh; a death for a death. This is not murder, Captain Horace, this is justice."

"Do you mean that you are going to shoot me here like a dog?"

"I have sworn it, Captain," returned the colonel with the implacability of the mild man once aroused. "You may have a few minutes to prepare to meet your Maker."

Captain Horace drew himself up and folded his arms. "Death and I are no strangers, Colonel Tolliver. It is many a year that I have been ready to meet my God. If you see fit to proceed with this outrage, I am at your service, sir."

Colonel Tolliver paled a little and moistened his lips with his tongue. He cocked the big pistol.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"I am ready," returned Captain Horace in a steady voice.

Perspiration came out on the colonel's forehead.

"Cicero!" he thundered, "you black scoundrel! If you don't stop that tremblin' I'll put the next bullet through you. Get behind me.

"Now, Captain." He raised the pistol, then lowered it a little. "May I ask you to close your eyes?"

Captain Horace veiled his bright dark eyes and held himself erect, chin high.

The colonel planted himself firmly, and raised the pistol slowly. His hand trembled a little at first, but he found the bead, held it well for a moment, then lowered his arm.

"Captain Horace," he said, in a strained voice, "is there any message you would like to send to your folks?"

The captain opened his eyes, brilliantly dark in a pale face. "There is only my mother," he replied in a low voice. "Tell her, 'God bless her; and—and good-bye.'"

The colonel's blue eyes were misty. "Very well, Captain," he assented huskily; "it shall be done."

He raised the pistol again and centered the sights between the captain's brows. He held the bead for a moment, then lowered his arm once more.

"Captain Horace," he said, "you are a brave man. Have you any directions for me after—afterwards?"

"As your guest," replied Captain Horace with a bitter smile, "I feel that I may safely entrust my ultimate disposition to your good judgment."

"Guest," repeated the colonel. His mouth was open a little, his face pale; a drop of perspiration ran from the end of one eyebrow down his cheek and dropped on the lapel of his coat.

"Guest!" he repeated, with more animation. "By gad, suh; no Southern gentleman would shoot a guest under his own rooftree. I hope I know enough about the sacred obligations of hospitality for that!" He uncocked the gun and threw it on the grass. "Cicero," he directed, sitting down rather weakly and mopping his forehead, "go down in the cellar and bring out that bottle of number eight port."

The Black Cat Club --- Second Contest

In the days when the writer was an amateur bill collector, when the literary bug was just buzzing around casually, he once cornered a delinquent tenant. He had taken up a position where he could watch both doors of a barn on the waterfront where the fellow had hidden and from which there was only one other means of exit. The man had his choice between coming out through one of the doors or dropping out through a window and landing in the cold waters of the harbor.

He came out. And while he was exchanging four dollars for a piece of paper which said, "Received payment" etc., on it, he addressed this remark to a fellow workman who was trucking a sack of potatoes upstage:

"For Gawd's sake, Bill, don't never get married."

"Hell, Dan," Bill replied, "I been married seventeen years," and there was that extreme disgust in his manner which implied that he would have been much obliged had Dan come around just seventeen years sooner with his advice.

That is going back a long way to establish a point; but we wish to impress upon you the fact that we want your advice now, not seventeen years hence or at some vague time in the future when you think that you will have more time. The confidence which we have in our ability to handle our job is no reason why we shouldn't solicit your friendly advice. Moreover, we think that you will get a lot more fun out of the magazine if you assume the mental attitude of the critic and write an occasional letter to the editor.

The proper thing to do is to become a member of The Black Cat Club, which was started in the November number. The object of the club is to stimulate interest in short stories. There are no dues. The duties of members are first, to read The Black Cat and submit criticisms of each issue with the stories arranged in the order of their merit, and second, to interest their friends in the club. Those members who have the impulse to write should submit their stories to the editor. All available stories will be paid for on acceptance. A club button has been designed and will be ready for distribution soon.

The first contest conducted by the club closed on December 1st. The result will be announced in the February issue, out January 15th.

The Second Contest comprises the stories in this issue (January) and all lists must be received at the office of THE BLACK CAT, Salem Mass., before February 1st. Prizes will be awarded February 5th and the result of the contest will be announced in the April BLACK CAT, issued March 15th.

A PRIZE OF $25 will be awarded to the author of the story which is selected as the best story of the month by the largest number of club members.

PRIZES OF $5 EACH will be awarded to the five members submitting the best criticisms.

A copy of THE BLACK CAT should be obtainable at any news stand, or it will be mailed to any address on receipt of ten cents. Members will find it to their advantage to become regular subscribers. The subscription price is one dollar per year. Any club member sending two yearly subscriptions will receive the magazine for one year free.

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